This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

UC-NRLF
$B 249 545

YB 74188

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Annie D. Clarke

Dec. 25, 1896 —

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Mrs MARTIN'S
COMPANY.

"RAIN, RAIN, & SUN! A RAINBOW ON THE LEA!
AND TRUTH IS THIS TO ME, & THAT TO THEE;
AND TRUTH OR CLOTHED OR NAKED LET IT BE"

Digitized by Google

All Rights Reserved.

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Mrs. MARTIN'S COMPANY

AND OTHER STORIES

BY JANE BARLOW
AUTHOR OF "IRISH IDYLLS"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY BERTHA NEWCOMBE

New York
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1896

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

955
B258
mw

Digitized by Google

KW

" Ein Kleiner Ring
Begränzt unser Leben."

GOETHE.

M239399

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

NOTE

"Mrs Martin's Company" and "A Very Light Railway" appeared in *The National Review*, "A Lost Recruit" and "A Case of Conscience," in *The Pall Mall Magazine*. I am indebted to the Editors of these periodicals for permission to reprint the stories here.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

MRS MARTIN'S COMPANY (*Illustrated*—p. 21) PAGE 1

A LOST RECRUIT (*Illustrated*) . . „ 27

AFTER SEVEN YEARS (*Illustrated—Frontispiece*) „ 59

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE (*Illustrated*) . „ 103

A PROVIDENT PERSON (*Illustrated*) . „ 132

A VERY LIGHT RAILWAY (*Illustrated*) . „ 171

ROSANNE . . . . „ 195

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

MRS MARTIN'S COMPANY

Mrs Martin lived down a high-banked lane, which, as it led no whither in particular, was subject to little traffic, and which she occupied all by herself, though her cabin stood the middle one in a row of three. You could see at a glance that the left-hand dwelling was vacant, for the browned thatch had fallen in helplessly, and the rafters stuck up through it like the ribs of a stranded wreck. The other was less obviously deserted; still its plight could be easily perceived in weedy threshold and cobweb-curtained window. It testified strongly to the lonesomeness of the neighbourhood that no child had yet enjoyed the bliss of sending a stone crash through the flawed greenish pane. Both of them had, in fact, been empty for many months. From the ruined one the Egan family had gone piecemeal, following each other westward in detachments, until even the wrinkled parents were settled in California, where they blinked by day at the strange fierce sunshine,

Digitized by Google

and dreamed by night back again under the soft-shadowed skies of the ould counthry. Soon after that, the O'Keefes had made a more abrupt flitting from next door, departing on the same day, all together, except little Kate and Joe, whose death of the fever was what had "given their poor mother, the crathur, a turn like agin the place." Since then no new tenants had succeeded them in the row, which was, to be sure, out of the way, and out of repair, and not in any respect a desirable residence.

The loss of her neighbours was a very serious misfortune to Mrs Martin, as she had long depended upon them for a variety of things, which she would have herself summed up in the term "company." She had been early widowed and left quite alone in the world, so that through most of the inexorable years which turned an eager-eyed girl into a regretful-looking little old woman, she had found herself obliged to seek much of her interest in life outside her own small domestic circle—all forlorn centre. This was practicable enough while she lived under one thatch with two large families, who were friendlily content that their solitary neighbour should take cognisance of their goings out and comings in. Upon

Digitized by Google

occasion, indeed, she had unforebodingly grumbled that the young Egans and O'Keefes "had her moidhered wid the whillaballoo they would be risin' contínyal." But when they were gone a terrible blank and silence filled up their place, as well might be, since her kind had thus suddenly receded far beyond her daily ken. A weary Irish mile intervened between her and the nearest cottages of Clonmacreevagh, and it was only "of a very odd while" her rheumatics had allowed her to hobble that far, even to Mass. Seldom or never now did she make her way at all down the windings of the lane, where the grass from its tall banks encroached monthly more and more upon the ancient ruts; and other passengers were hardly less infrequent. The lands about lay waste, or in sheep-walks, so that there was nothing to bring farm-carts and horses and men lumbering and plodding along it, and to attract anybody else what was there but a mournful little old woman in a dark cavernous kitchen, where the only bright objects were the fire-blink and the few bits of shining crockery on the dresser, which she had not often the heart these times to polish up? So week out and week in, never a foot went

Digitized by Google

past her door, as a rule with just one exception.

Michael O'Toole, a farmer on the townland, did her the kindness of letting his cart drive out of its way every Saturday and leave at her house the "loaves and male and grains of tay," which her lameness would have otherwise made it difficult for her to come by. This was, of course, a great convenience, and ensured her one weekly caller. But, unluckily for her, Tim Doran the carter was a man quite singularly devoid of conversational gifts, and so grimly unsociable besides, that her provisions might almost as well have been washed up by the sea, or conveyed to her by inarticulate ravens. If he possibly could, he would always dump down the parcels on the road before her door, and jog along hurriedly unaccosted; and though Mrs Martin could generally prevent that by keeping a lookout for him, she never succeeded in attaining to the leisurely gossip after which she hungered. Beyond monosyllables Tim would not go, and the poor little wiles by which she sought to inveigle him into discourse failed of detaining him as signally as if they had been gossamer threads stretched across his road. She had so often tried, for instance,

Digitized by Google

to lengthen his halt by telling him she thought "the horse was after pickin' up a stone," that at last he ceased even to glance at the beast's feet for verification, but merely grunted and said: "Oh, git along out of that, mare." Then the mud-splashed blue cart, and sorrel horse, and whity-brown jacket, would pass out of sight round the turn of the lane, and the chances were that she would not again set eyes on a human face, until they reappeared jogging from the opposite direction that day week.

In the long afternoons, which sometimes began for her before twelve o'clock if she got expeditiously through her "readyin' up," the lag-foot hours seemed dismally empty, and during them she was especially prone to crown her sorrow with memories of her happier things: of the time when she need only slip out at her own door, and in at Mrs Egan's or Mrs O'Keefe's, if she wanted plenty of company, and when "themselves or the childer would be runnin' in to her every minute of the day. If there was nothin' else," she mused, "the crathurs of hins and chuckens foostherin' about the place looked a thrifle gay like." Mrs Martin herself kept no fowl, for "how would she get hobblin' after them, if they tuk to strayin' on

Digitized by Google

her?" And she had attempted vainly to adopt the O'Keefe's cat, which became unsettled in its mind upon the departure of its late owners, and at length roamed desperately away into unknown regions. Thus, nowadays, when the little old woman gazed listlessly over her half-door, all she could see was the quiet green bank across the road, with perhaps a dingy white sheep inanely nibbling atop. Then she would sometimes feel at first as if it were only a dreary Sunday or holiday, when the silence and solitude being caused by her neighbours' absence at Mass would end on their return; but presently she would be stricken with the recollection that they were irrevocably gone, and that, watch as long as she might, she would never more hear their voices grow louder and clearer coming up the lane, preluding their appearance anon, a cheerful company, round the turn fast by.

One afternoon, however, her hopeless lookout did result in something pleasant. It was a Christmas Eve, and dull, chilly weather, overclouded with fleecy grey, thinned here and there into silvery dimness, a sheath from which a fiery rose might flush at sun-setting. She was just turning away with a shiver from the

Digitized by Google

draughty door when she caught a glimpse of Father Gilmore's long coat flapping between the banks. It was a welcome sight, which she had missed through six tedious months and more, for his Reverence, after a severe illness in the spring, had been somehow provided with funds to go seek lost health abroad, and had fared southward upon that quest. His travels, indeed, seemed to have been inconceivably extended. When to Mrs Martin's question: "And was your Riverence, now, anythin' as far as Paris?" he replied, with a touch of triumph, "A long step *further*," her imagination recoiled from so wild a track, and she could only stare at him as if astonished to see no visible traces of such wanderings, except maybe a slight tawny tinge like the rust-wraith of many hot sunbeams, superimposed on the normal greenish hue of his well-worn cloth.

Father Gilmore spared her half-an-hour of delightful discourse, to which his own foreign adventures and the home news from Clonmacreevagh gave an animated flow. But when Mrs Martin's turn came to give an account of herself the conversation fell into a minor key. And the theme that ran through all her despondence was the plaint that she did be terrible

Digitized by Google

short of company. "She had middlin' good health, barrin' the rheumatiz, thanks be to God, but sure she did be cruel lonesome. It's lost she was there, wid niver sight nor sound of man or mortal from mornin' till night; she might as well be an ould wether left fallen in a gripe for all she seen or heard of anythin'. 'Deed now 'twas just the one way wid her as wid the waft of smoke there up her ould chimney that went fluttherin' out on the width of the air, and sorra another breath anywheres nigh it, since ever the crathurs quit. Many a mornin' she'd scarce the heart to be puttin' a light to her fire at all, she was that fretted, ay bedad, she was so."

To these laments Father Gilmore listened with a patience made more difficult by his consciousness that he could suggest no remedy of the practically appropriate sort which is to general consolatory propositions as a close and cordial hearth-glow to the remote and mocking sunshine of a wintry sky. If you want to warm your cold hands those league-long flames some millions of miles away are so much less immediately to the purpose than your neighbouring screed of ruddy coals. This drifted mistily through his mind, as for lack of a more

Digitized by Google

satisfactory remark he said: "You wouldn't think of moving into the town?" But he was well aware that he had spoken foolishly, even before Mrs Martin answered: "Ah, your Riverence, how would I, so to spake, be runnin' me head out from under me penny of rint?" For her husband, a gamekeeper up at the Big House of the parish, had lost his life by accident at a shooting party, and the family had pensioned off his widow with five weekly shillings and her cabin rent free.

"True for you, Mrs Martin," said Father Gilmore, standing up. "But sure, lonely or no, we're all under the protection of God Almighty, and I've brought you a little ornament for your room." Mrs Martin's eyes sparkled at the last clause of his sentence, while he took out of his pocket a small parcel, and began to strip off its wrappages, which were many folds of bluish tissue-paper, with layers of grey-green dried grass between. "The man I got it from at Marseilles," he said, "told me a lot of them came from Smyrna, and I never stirred these papers that were on it, thinkin' I mightn't be able to do it up so well again. I only hope it's not broke on us."

Digitized by Google

As the thin sheets and light grass-wisps fell off, the blast whistling under the door-sill whisked them about the uneven floor, and Mrs Martin drew in her breath expectantly. At last the treasure was discovered in perfect preservation, an alabaster statuette of the Virgin, some two fingers high.

I do not know that it was a very fine work of art, but at worst you cannot easily make anything ugly out of alabaster. The Child lay placidly asleep, and the Mother looked young and happy and benignant. For a few moments Mrs Martin's admiration was quite incoherent, and when she found words Father Gilmore sought to stem the tide of ecstatic gratitude by saying, "And where will you put it? Why, here's a niche looks as if it might have been made for it." The place he pointed to was a little recess beneath a tiny window-slit, formed partly by design, but enlarged by the chance falling out of a fragment from the stone-and-mud wall. A long ray, slanted from the clearing west, reached through the half-door, quivered across the dark room, and just touched the white figure as he set it down. Against the background of grimy wall it shone as if wrought of rosed snow.

Digitized by Google

"Bedad, then, it's there I'll keep her, and nowhere else," said the little old woman, and he left her in rapt contemplation. As he trudged home he felt sure that his few francs had been well bestowed, and his conviction strengthened with each tedious twist of the deserted ways which lay between Mrs Martin and her company. By the time he had gained his own house his uppermost thought was a regret that such a trifle had been all he could do for the poor ould dacint body—the Lord might pity her.

It was, however, by no means a trifle to the poor old body herself. For the first few days after her acquisition of the image it took up a wonderful deal of her time and thoughts. Even when she was not standing at gaze in front of it she but seldom lost it from her sight. Her eyes were continually turning towards the niche, whence it seemed strangely to dominate the room. Its clear whiteness made a mark for the feeblest gleam of ebbing daylight or fading embers; it was the last object to be muffled under bat's-wing gloom, and the first to creep back when morning glimmered in again. She dusted it superfluously many times a day, with a proud pleasure always some-

Digitized by Google

what dashed by the remembrance that she could exhibit it to no neighbours, who would say, with variations, "Ah! glory be among us, Mrs Martin, ma'am, but that's rael iligant entirely. Och woman, dear, did you ever see the like of that now at all, at all?"

Still, the most marvellous piece of sculpture ever chiselled would probably betray deficiencies if adopted as one's sole companion in life; and Mrs Martin's little statuette had obvious shortcomings when so regarded. As the winter wore on the weight of her solitude pressed more and more heavily. The bad weather increased her isolation. Some days there were of bitter frost and snow, and some of streaming rain, and many of wild wind. Once or twice Tim Doran brought her a double supply of provisions, and did not return for a fortnight, and then she felt indeed cut adrift. By-and-bye her vague disconsolateness began to take shape in more definite terrors. She was beset with surmises of ill-disposed vagrants tramping that way to practise unforbidden on her wretched life, and she crept trembling to and from the pool where she filled her water-can. Or ghostly fears overcame her, and she thought at night that she heard the little dead children

Digitized by Google

keening in the deserted room next door, and that mysterious shadows went past the windows, and unseen hands rattled the latch. But through all her shifting mist of trouble the alabaster Virgin shone on her steadily with just a ray of consolation. Every night she said her Rosary before the niche, and almost always her devotions ended in a prayer of her own especial wishing and wording.

"Ah, Lady dear," she would say, "wouldn't you think now to be sendin' me a bit of company? me that's left as disolit as the ould top of Slieve Moyneran this great while back. Ah, wouldn't you then, me Lady? Sure if that's a thrue likeness of you at all, there's the look on you that it's plased you'd be to do a poor body e'er a good turn, ay, is there, bedad. And I couldn't tell you the comfort 'twould be to me, not if I was all night tellin'. Just a neighbour droppin' in now and agin', acushla, I wouldn't make bold to ax you for them to be livin' convenient alongside of me the way they was. Sure I know the roof's quare and bad, and 'twas small blame to them they quit; but to see an odd sight of one, Lady jewel, if it wouldn't go agin you to conthrive that much. Ah, darlint, supposin' it was only a little ould poor ould

Digitized by Google

wisp of a lone woman the same as meself, it's proud I'd be to behould her; or if it was Crazy Christy, that does be talkin' foolish, the crathur, troth, all's one, the sound of the voice spakin' 'ud be plisant to hear, no matter what ould blathers he tuk the notion to be gabbin'. For it's unnathural still and quiet here these times, Lady dear, wid sorra a livin' sowl comin' next or nigh me ever. But sure 'tis the lonesome house you kep' yourself, Lady dear, one while, and belike you'll remimber it yet, for all you've got back your company agin, ay have you, glory be to God. And wid the help of the Lord it's slippin' over I'll be meself one of these days to them that's gone from me, and no fear but I'll have the grand company then. Only it's the time between whiles does be woeful long and dhrary-like. So if you wouldn't think too bad, Lady honey, to send me the sight of a crathur——." Thus she rambled on piteously, but in answer seemed to come nothing more companionable than the wide-winged gusts of the night wind roving the great grass lands at the back of her cabin where the tiny window-slit peered out. And day followed day with not a step or voice.

It was on a mild-aired morning midway in

Digitized by Google

February that Mrs Martin, when dusting her precious image, noticed a vivid green speck dotted on the grey wall near its foot. Looking closer, she saw two atoms of leaves pricked up through the cracked mud, belonging no doubt to some seedling weed, she thought, and she would have brushed them away had not some other trifle just then diverted her attention. A few days afterwards, when she happened again to take heed of them, they were crowning a slender shoot, fledged with other delicate leaflets, film-frail, and semi-transparent. She thought the little spray looked pretty and "off the common," and next morning she was pleased to see that it had crept a bit further on the dark wall. Thenceforward she watched its growth with a deep interest. It throve apace. Every day showed a fresh unfolding of leaf-buds and lengthening of stalks, which seemed to climb with a purpose, as if moved by a living will. Their goal was indeed the narrow chink which let a wedge of light slant in just above the Virgin's glistering head, and in making for it they caught boldly at anything that offered tendril-hold. One morning the little old woman untwisted a coil of fairy cordage that was enringing the Virgin's feet, and often after this

Digitized by Google

she had to disengage the figure from the first beginnings of wreathings and windings amongst which it would speedily have disappeared. As it was, they soon filled up the niche with a tangled greenery, and overflowed in long trails and festoons drooping to the floor. Never was there a carven shrine wrought with such intricate traceries. When the early-rising sun struck in through them, the floor was flecked with the wavering shadows of the small fine leaves, whilst they themselves took a translucent vividness of hue that might have been drawn from wells of liquid chrysoprase and beryl; and amid the bower of golden-green steadily glimmered the white-stoled Virgin.

All this was the work of but a few weeks, scarcely stepping over the threshold of Spring. The little old woman watched its progress with pleasure and astonishment. She had never, she said, seen the like of any such a thing before. As the wonder grew, she felt more and more keenly the lack of someone to whom she might impart it. She did try to tell Tim Doran, but the opposite turf-bank would not have received the intelligence much more blankly, and could not have grunted with such discouraging indifference in reply. The man, she thought

Digitized by Google

bitterly, was "as stupid as an ould blind cow. If you tould him you had the Queen of Agypt and the Lord Lieutenant sittin' in there colloguin' be the fire, he wouldn't throuble himself to take a look in at the door." However, no less stolid listeners were forthcoming. Father Gilmore was paying the penalty for his ill-timed return to northern climes in a series of bad colds, and the other neighbours never set foot up the lane.

At last she bethought her of communicating with Father Gilmore by a letter, which Tim Doran might carry, and she laboriously composed one in time for his next weekly call. Whether he would deliver it or not was a point which his manner left doubtful; but he actually did so. Mrs Martin's letter was "scrawmed" on a bit of coarse brown paper, which, when I saw it some time ago, still smelt so pungently of tea, that I think it must have wrapped one of her parcels. The writing on it ran as follows:—

"Your Reverence,—Hopin' this finds you in good health, thanks be to God. Plase your Reverence, the Quarest that ever you witnessed has got clamberin' inside on the wall. I dunno what at all to say to it; never the like of it I seen. But the creelin' of it and the crawlin' of it would terrify you. Makin' offers now and agin it does be to smoother the Houly Virgin, but sure I'd be long sorry to let it do that bad thrick,

Digitized by Google

after all the goodness of your Reverence. And I was thinkin' this long while your Reverence might be maybe steppin' our way yourself some day, for creepin' over all before it it is every minute of time. Such a terrible quare thing I never heard tell of, and the sorra another sowl except meself have I about the place.

"Your obedient,
"MARY MARTIN."

This letter caused Father Gilmore considerable uneasiness, for it filled him with misgivings about the mental condition of the writer. Her account of "the Quarest that ever you witnessed," sounded, he feared, painfully like the hallucinations of a mind distempered by over long solitude. "Indeed it's no way for the poor ould body to be left, if one could help it," he mused. Even in his meditations I am sure that Father Gilmore must have used his soft southern brogue—"I've thought many a time it was enough to drive her demented—and now there's some quare sort of delusion she's taken into her head, that's plain, goodness pity her. I'd have done right to go see after her before this, as I was intendin', only somethin' always happened to hinder me."

He was determined now against any further delay, and he set out that very afternoon to visit his afflicted parishioner. The expedition was

Digitized by Google

rather formidable to him, as he had a natural shrinking from stormy scenes, and he fully expected that he would find poor little Mrs Martin if not downright "raving in no small madness," at least labouring under some frightful delusion, in the shape, apparently, of a hideous monster infesting her abode. This prospect made him so nervously apprehensive that he was glad to fall in with a small youth, one Paddy Greer, who seemed inclined to accompany him upon his walk. All the way along, between the greening hedges of the lane, he remonstrated with himself for letting the gossoon share unwittingly in such an errand, yet he could not make up his mind to dismiss Paddy, or to feel otherwise than relieved by the continued bare-foot patter at his side.

But his relief was far greater when on reaching the cabin he saw its mistress in her little green plaid shawl and black skirt and white cap, standing at her door among the long westering sunbeams, without any signs of excitement or aberration in her demeanour; and his mind grew quite easy when he ascertained that the creeping thing indoors was no horrible phantasmal reptile, but only a twining tapestry

Digitized by Google

of bright leaves and sprays, which trailed a fold of Spring's garment into the dark-cornered room. Still, satisfactorily as the matter had been cleared up from his former point of view, he could suggest nothing to lessen Mrs Martin's wonder at the mysterious appearance of the creeper on her wall. His acquaintance with such things was slight, and he merely had an impression that the fashion of the delicately luxuriant foliage seemed unfamiliar to him. So he promised to return on the morrow with the national school-teacher, who was reputed a knowledgeable man about plants. Before that came to pass, however, Mrs Martin had another visitor. For little Paddy ran home to his mother with the news that "the Widdy Martin was after showin' his Reverence a green affair she had stuck up on her wall, and that he said it was rale super-exthrornary altogether, and he'd get Mr Colclough to it." At that hearing the curiosity of Paddy's mother incited her to call without losing a moment at Mrs Martin's house, where she inspected the marvellous growth as well as the falling twilight permitted, and admired the gracious-looking little image quite to its owner's content. Thus Mrs Martin enjoyed a sociable cup of tea, and an enthralling

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

gossip, which sent her to bed that evening in much better spirits than usual.

Next morning arrived Father Gilmore with the schoolmaster, who was unable to identify the strange creeper, but called its appearance a phenomenon, which seemed somehow to take the edge off the admission of ignorance. His failure only served to heighten a sense of awe and wonderment among several of the neighbours, who also looked in on her during the day. For the village rapidly filled with reports of "the big wrathe of green laves that was windin' itself round the Widdy Martin's grand image of the Blessed Virgin, and it inside on her wall, mind you, where 'twould be a surprisin' thing to see e'er a plant settlin' to grow at all." And about the same time they discovered that the Widdy's house was "no such great way to spake of onst you turned down the lane; you could tramp it aisy in a little betther than ten minutes or so from the corner, if you had a mind." In the days which followed numbers of them were so minded, vastly to the comfort of the little old woman, who welcomed them with unbounded joy, and as many cups of tea as she could by any means compass. She harboured no resentment on the score of their

Digitized by Google

long and dreary defection. That was all ended at last. For as the spring weather mellowed into April, and the imprisoned creeper daily flung out profuser sprays and tendril-spirals, the fame of it spread far and wide over the town-lands, until its habitation became quite a place of resort. So many people now turned down the lane that they soon wore a track, which you could see distinctly if you looked along a stretch of its grass-grown surface. The Doctor came, and the District-Inspector, and the Protestant clergyman. Even "higher-up Quality" arrived, and satin-coated steeds have been seen tossing their silver-crested blinkers at the little old woman's door under the supervision of grooms resplendently polished. Seldom or never in these times had she to weary through a long, lonely afternoon; more often she held a crowded reception, when the clack of tongues and clatter of thick-rimmed delft cups sounded cheerily in her kitchen. They scared away all her fears of tramps and ghosts; and she no longer ended her Rosary with mournful petitions for company. Her company had duly assembled.

Towards the beginning of June a fresh development of the marvel occurred, for then

Digitized by Google

the creeper blossomed. Thickly clustered bunches of pale green buds broke swiftly into fantastic curven-throated bugles of a clear-glowing apricot colour, which made gleams as of beaded light in the dark places where they unsheathed themselves. Mrs Martin said it looked "like as if somebody was after tyin' knots in a ray of the sunshine." Just at this crisis a Professor from one of the Queen's Colleges, chancing to be in the neighbourhood, was brought to pronounce upon the case. As behoved a learned man, he gave it an ugly name, which we may ignorantly forget, and he said that it belonged to a species of plants, rare even in its far off oriental habitat, but totally unexampled beneath these northern skies.

However, soon after he had gone, leaving no luminous wake behind him, the little old woman made a brilliant discovery. It was on that same evening, while she was drinking tea with a few of her good gossips, for whom she entertained as strong a regard as did Madam Noah in the ancient Morality. Naturally enough, the "quareness" and general inscrutability of the strange creeper had been under discussion, when Mrs Martin suddenly said: "Ah! women, dear, what talk have we then

Digitized by Google

at all, at all? Sure now it's come clear in me own mind this instaint minute that whatever it may be, 'twas the Virgin herself, Heaven bless her, set it growin' there wid itself, just of a purpose to be fetchin' me in me company. For, signs on it, ne'er a day there is since folk heard tell of it, that there doesn't be some comin' and goin' about the place, and makin' it plisant and gay-like. And sorra a thing else is it brought them, except to be seein' the quare new plant; aye, bedad, 'twas them twistin' boughs on it streeled the whole lot along in here to me, same as if they were a manner of landin'-net. And sure wasn't I moidherin' her every night of me life to be sendin' me some company? 'Deed was I so, and be the same token ne'er a word of thanks have I thought of sayin' to her, after her takin' the throuble to conthrive it that-away, more shame for me, but I was that tuk up wid it all."

"Thrue for you, Mrs Martin, ma'am," said Mrs Brennan; "aiten bread's soon forgotten, as the sayin' is. Howane'er there's nothin' liker than that that was the way of it as you say. What else 'ud be apt to make it go clamber all round the image of her, as if 'twas her belongin'? And didn't the gintleman tell

Digitized by Google

you 'twas nothin' that grows be rights next or nigh this counthry? Ah, for sure 'tis from far enough it's come, if 'twas the likes of Them sent it. And a kind thought it was too, glory be to God."

Mrs Martin's theory gained almost unanimous approval, and was generally accepted by her neighbours, Father Gilmore sanctioning it with a half wistful assent. It had the effect of enhancing the interest taken in the flourishing creeper and the little withered dame, the pledge and recipient of so signal a favour from those who are still the recognised powers that be in such places as Clonmacreevagh. The idea gave a tinge of religious sentiment to the soon established custom of visiting Mrs Martin, and on the weekly market days you often might have supposed some kind of miniature *pattern* in progress at her cabin, so great was the resort thither of shawled and cloaked and big-basketed country-wives. These guests seldom came empty handed—a couple of fresh eggs, or a roll of butter, or a cake of griddle-bread would be reserved for her at the bottom of the roomy creel. Other visitors were fain to carry off slips of the many trailing sprays, and would leave payment for them in silver coin, which

Digitized by Google

sometimes had the comfortable portliness of half-crowns. But I do not believe that the little old woman valued these very highly, and I think most of them went in providing the strong black tea with which she loved to refresh her friends. And there was never an evening that she did not add to her Rosary: "And the Lord bless the kind heart of you then, Lady jewel, for sendin' me the bit of company."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A LOST RECRUIT

WHEN Mick Doherty heard that there was to be route-marching next day in the neighbourhood of Kilmacrone, he determined upon going off for a long "stravade" coastwards over the bog, where there were no roads worth mentioning, and no risks of an encounter with the military. In this he acted differently from all his neighbours, most of whom, upon learning the news, began to speculate and plan how they might see and hear as much as possible of their unwonted visitors. Opinions were chiefly divided as to whether the Murghadeen cross-roads would be the best station to take up, or the fork of the lane at Berrisbawn House. People who, for one reason or another, could not go so far afield, consoled themselves by reflecting that the band, at any rate, would be likely to come through the village, and would no doubt strike up a tune while passing, as it had done a couple of years ago, the last time the red-coats had appeared in Kilmacrone. And, och, but that was the grand

Digitized by Google

playin' intirely! It done your heart good just to be hearin' the sound of it, bedad it did so. Old Mrs Geoghegan said it was liker the sort of thunderstorms they might be apt to have in Heaven above, than aught else she could think of, might goodness forgive her for sayin' such a thing; and Molly Joyce said she'd as lief as not have sat down and cried when was passed beyond her listenin', it went that delightful, thumpety-thump, wid the tune flyin' up over it.

The military authorities at Fortbrack were not ignorant of this popular sentiment, and had considered it in the order of that day. For experience had shown that a progress of troops through the surrounding country districts generally conduced to the appearance before the recruiting officer of sundry long-limbed, loose-jointed Pats, Micks, and Joes; and a recent scarcity of this raw material made it seem expedient to bring such an influence to bear upon the new ground of remote Kilmacrone. Certain brigades and squadrons were accordingly directed to move thitherward, under the general idea that an invading force from the south-east had occupied Ballybeg Allan, while in pursuance of another general idea, really more to the purpose, though

Digitized by Google

not officially announced, the accompanying band received instructions to be liberal and lively in its performances by the way.

All along their route through the wide brown land the soldiers might be sure of drawing as much sympathetic attention as that lonesome west country could concentrate on any given line. Probably there would be no one disposed like Mick Doherty to get out of the way, unless some very small child roared and ran, if of a size to have acquired the latter accomplishment, at the sound of the booming drums. To the great majority of these on-lookers the spectacle would be a rare and gorgeous pageant, a memory resplendent across twilight-hued time-tracts as a vision of scarlet and golden gleams, and proudly-pacing horses, and music that made you feel you had never known how much life there was in you all the while. Some toll, it is true, had to be paid for this enjoyment. When it had passed by things suddenly grew very flat and colourless, and there was a tendency to feel more or less vaguely aggrieved because you could not go a-soldiering yourself. In cases, however, where circumstances rendered that obviously impossible, as when people were too old or infirm, or were women or girls, this thrill of discontent, seldom

Digitized by Google

very acute, soon subsided, by virtue of the self-preserving instinct which forbids us to persist in knocking our heads hard against our stone walls. But it was different where the beholder was so situated that he could imagine himself riding or striding after the rapturous march-music to fields of peril and valour and glory, without diminishing the vividness of the picture by simultaneously supposing himself some quite other person. The gleam in young Felix M'Guinness's eyes, as he watched the red files dwindle and twinkle out of sight, was to the brightening up beneath his grandfather's shaggy brows as the forked flash is to the shimmering sheet lightnings, that are but a harmless reflection from far-off storms. And there indeed pleasure paid a ruinous duty. If those who were liable to it did not imitate Mick Doherty's prudence and hold aloof, the reason may have been that they had not fortitude enough to turn away from excitement offered on any terms, or that their position was less desperately tantalising than his; and the latter explanation is the more probable one, since few lads in and about Kilmacrone can have had their martial aspirations baulked by an impediment so flimsy and yet so effectual.

Digitized by Google

There was nothing in the world to hinder Mick from enlisting except just the unreasonableness of his mother, and that was an unreasonableness so unreasonable as to verge upon what her neighbours would have called "quare ould conthrariness." For though a widow woman, and therefore entitled to occupy a pathetic position, its privileges were defined by the opinion that "she was not so badly off intirely as she might ha' been." Mick's departure need not have left her desolate, since she had another son and daughter at home, besides Essie married in the village, and Brian settled down at Murghadeen, where he was doing well, and times and again asking her to come and live with him. Then Mick would have been able to help her out of his pay much more efficaciously than he could do by his earnings at Kilmacrone, where work was slack and its wage low, so that the result of a lad's daily labour sometimes seemed mainly the putting of a fine edge on a superfluous appetite. All these points were most clearly seen by Mick in the light of a fiercely-burning desire; but that availed him nothing unless he could set them as plainly before some one else who was not thus illuminated. And not far from two

Digitized by Google

years back he had resolved that he would attempt to do so no more.

The soldiers had been about in the district on the day before, scattered like poppy beds over the bog, and signalling and firing till the misty October air tingled with excitement. When you have lived your life among wide-bounded solitudes, where the silence is oftenest broken by the plover's pipe, or the croak of some heavily flapping bird, you will know the meaning of a bugle call. Mick and his contemporaries had acted as camp-followers from early till late with ever intensifying ardour; one outcome whereof was that he heard his especial crony, Paddy Joyce, definitely decide to go and enlist at Fortbrack next Monday, which gave a turn more to the pinching screw of his own banned wish. It was with a concerted scheme for ascertaining whether there were any chance of bringing his mother round to a rational view of the matter that he and his friend dropped into her cabin next morning, on the way to carry up a load of turf. Mrs Doherty was washing her couple of blue-checked aprons in an old brown butter-crock, and Mick thought he had introduced the subject rather happily when he told her "she

Digitized by Google

had a right to be takin' her hands out of the suds, and dippin' the finest curtsey she could conthrive, and she wid the Commander-in-Gineral of the Army Forces steppin' in to pay her a visit." Of course this statement required, as it was intended to require, elucidation, so Mick proceeded to announce: "It's himself's off to Fortbrack a Monday, 'listin' he'll be in the Edenderry Light Infantry; so the next time we set eyes on him it's blazin' along the street we'll see him, like the boys we had here yisterday."

"Ah! sure now, that'll be grand," said Mrs Doherty, unwarily complaisant; "we'll all be proud to behold him that way. 'Tis a fine thing for any young man who's got a fancy to take up wid it."

"Och, then, bedad it is so!" said Mick with emphasis, promptly making for the opening given to him.

"Bedad it is," said Paddy.

"There's nothin' like it," said Mick.

"Ah, nothin' at all," said Paddy.

Mrs Doherty made no remark as she twisted a dripping apron into a sausage-shaped roll to wring the water out.

"How much was it you were sayin' you'd

Digitized by Google

have in the week, Paddy, just to put in your pocket for your divarsion like?" inquired Mick, with a convenient lapse of memory.

"Och, seven or eight shillin's anyway," said Paddy, in the tone of one to whom shillings had already become trivial coins, "and that, mind you, after you've ped for the best of aitin' and dhrinkin', and your kit free, and no call to be spendin' another penny unless you plase. Sure, Long Murphy was tellin' me he was up in the town a while ago, on a day when they were just after gettin' their pay, and he said the Post Office was that thick wid the soldier-lads sendin' home the money to their friends, he couldn't get speech of a clerk to buy his stamp be no manner of manes, not if he'd wrecked the place. 'Twas the Sidmouth Fusiliers was in it that time; they're off to Limerick now."

"But that's a grand regulation they have," said Mick, "wid the short service nowadays. Where's the hardship in it when a man can quit at the ind of three year, if he's so plased? Three year's no time to speak of."

"Sure, not at all; you'd scarce notice it passin' by. Like Barney Bralligan's song that

Digitized by Google

finished before it begun—isn't that the way of it, ma'am?"

"It's a goodish len'th of a while," said Mrs Doherty.

"But thin there's the lave: don't be forgettin' the lave, Paddy man. Supposin' we——"

"Tub-be sure, there's the lave. Why, it's skytin' home on lave they do be most continial. And the Edenderrys is movin' no further than just to Athlone; that's as handy a place as you could get."

"You'd not thravel from this to Athlone in the inside of a week, if it was iver so handy," said Mrs Doherty.

"Is it a week? Och! blathershins, Mrs Doherty ma'am, you're mistook intirely. Sure, onst you've stepped into the town yonder, the train'll take you there in a flash. And the trains do be oncommon convenient."

"Free passes!" prompted Mick.

"Ay, bedad, and free passes they'll give to any souldier takin' his furlough; so sorra the expense 'twould be supposin' Mick here had a notion to slip home of an odd day and see you."

"*Mick!*" said Mrs Doherty.

"Och well, I was just supposin'. But I'm tould"—the many remarkable facts which Paddy

Digitized by Google

had been tould lost nothing in repetition—"that they'll sometimes have out a special train for a man in the army, if he wants to go anywhere partic'lar in a hurry—there's iligance for you. And as for promotion, it's that plinty you'll scarce git time to remimber your rank from one day to the next, whether it's a full private you are, or a lance-corporal, or maybe somethin' greater. Troth, there's nothin' a man mayn't rise to. And then, Mrs Doherty, it's the proud woman you'd be—*anybody'd* be—that they hadn't stood in the way of it. And pensions—he might be pensioned off wid as much as a couple of shillin's a day."

"Not this long while yet, plase the pigs," broke out Mick, squaring his shoulders, as if Time were a visible antagonist, and momentarily forgetting the matter immediately in hand. "But there's chances in it—splendid—och, it's somethin' you may call livin'."

"And," said his friend, "the rations I'm tould is surprisin' these times. The top of everythin' that's to be got, uncooked, widout bone."

Paddy and Mick discoursed for a good while in this strain about the dignities and amenities of a military life, and Mrs Doherty

Digitized by Google

had not much to say on the subject. During the conversation, however, she continued to rinse one of her aprons, and wring it dry very carefully, and drop it back into the water, like a machine slightly out of gear, which goes on repeating some process ineffectually. The two friends read in her silence an omen of acquiescent conviction, and congratulated one another upon it with furtive nods and winks. Mick went off to the bog in high feather, believing that the interview had been a great success, and that his mother was, as Paddy put it, "comin' round to the notion gradual, like an ould goat grazin' round its tetherin' stump." His hopes, indeed, were so completely in the ascendant that he summed up his most serious uneasiness when he said to himself: "She'll do right enough, no fear, or I'd niver think of it, if Thady was just somethin' steadier. But sure he might happen to git a thrifle more wit yet; he's no great age to spake of."

But when he came home about sunsetting, his mother was feeding her few hens outside their cabin, the end one of a mossy-roofed row, with its door turned at right angles to the others, looking out across the purple-brown of the bogland to the far-off hills, faint, like a blue

Digitized by Google

mist with a waved pattern in it, against the horizon. Mick, brought up short by the group, woke out of his walking dream, in which he had been performing acts of valour to the tune of the "Soldier's Chorus" in Gounod's *Faust*, the last thing the band had played yesterday; and he noticed a diminution in the select circle of fowls, who crooned and crawked and pecked round the broken dish of scraps.

"I see the specklety pullet's after strayin' on you agin," he said: "herself's the conthrary little bein'; I must take a look about for her prisintly."

"Ah, sure she's sold," said his mother; "it's too many I had altogether. I was torminted thryin' to get feedin' for them. So I sold her this mornin' to Mrs Dunne at Loughmore, that gave me a fine price for her. 'Deed she'd have took her off of me this while back, on'y I'd just a sort of notion agin partin' from the crathur. But be comin' in to your supper, child alive; it's ready waitin' this good while. Molly's below at her sister's, and I dunno where Thady's off to, so there's on'y you and me in it to-night."

In the room the more familiar odour of turf-smoke was overborne by a crisp smell of baking, and Mrs Doherty picked up a steaming plate

Digitized by Google

which had been keeping warm on the hearth. "Isn't that somethin' like now?" she said, setting it on the table triumphantly. "Rale grand they turned out this time, niver a scorch on the whole of them. I was afeard me hand might maybe ha' got out o' mixin' them, 'tis so long since I had e'er a one for you, but sure I bought a half-stone of seconds wid the price of the little hin, and that'll make a good few, so it will, jewel avic, and then we must see after some more. Take one of the thick bits, honey."

Probably most of us have had experience of the unceremonious methods which Fate often chooses when communicating to us important arrangements. We have seen by what a little-seeming triviality of an incident she may intimate that our cherished hope has been struck dead, or that the execution of some other decree has turned the current of our life away. It is sometimes as if she contemptuously sent us a grotesque and dwarfish messenger, who makes grimaces at us while telling us the bad news, which is ungenerous and scarcely dignified. So we need not wonder if Mick Doherty had to read the death-warrant of his darling ambition in a pile of three-cornered griddle-cakes. At any rate, he did read it there swiftly as clearly.

Digitized by Google

Most likely he knew it all before the plate was set on the table, and his heart had already gone down with a run when he replied to his mother's commendations that they looked first-rate. As he endorsed this praise with what appetite he could, being, indeed, mechanically hungry, the uppermost thought in his mind was how he should at once let his mother understand that she had got the price she hoped for her pet hen; and after considering for a while, he said: "Did you ever notice the quare sort of lane-over the turf-stack out there's takin' on it? I question hadn't we done righter to have took a leveler bit of ground for under it. But I was thinkin' this mornin'"—of what a different subject he had been thinking—"that next year I'd thry buildin' it agin the back o' th' ould shed, where there does be ne'er a slant at all."

"Ay, sure that 'ud be grand," said Mrs Doherty, much more elated than if she had heard of a large fortune; "you couldn't find an iliganter place for it in the width of this world." She felt quite satisfied that her craftily-timed treat had dispelled the dreaded danger, which actually was the case in a way. But if Mick would stay at home with her, she was perfectly content to suppose that she came after a griddle-

Digitized by Google

cake in his estimation. Her relief made her unusually talkative; but Mick was reflecting between his answers how he must now tell Paddy Joyce that they were never to be comrades after all.

He went out on this mission immediately after supper. The sun had gone down and the cold clearness left showed things plainly, yet was not light. In front of the cabin-rows the small children of the place were screeching over their final romp and quarrel, as they did every evening; fowls and goats and pigs were settling down for the night with the squawks and bleats and squeals which also took place every evening; on the brown-hollowed grass-bank between Colgan's and O'Reilly's, old Morissy, the blind fiddler, was feebly scraping and twangling, according to his custom every evening, and, for that matter, all day long. Even the wisps of straw and scraps of paper blowing down the middle of the wide roadway seemed to have whirled over and over and caught in the rough patches of stone, just so, as often as the sun had set. Close to the Joyces', Mick met Peter Maclean driving home a brood of ducklings. A broad and burly man, who says "shoo-shoo" to a high-piping cluster of tiny yellow ducks, and

Digitized by Google

flourishes a long willow wand to keep them from straggling out of their compacted trot, does undoubtedly present rather an absurd appearance; yet I cannot explain why the sight should have seemed to prick like a sting through the wide weary disgust which Mick experienced as he stood in the twilit boreen waiting for Paddy to come out. He had scarcely a grunt to exchange for Peter's cheerful "Fine evenin'." What does it signify in a universal desert whether evenings be fine or foul?

Altogether, it had been a bad time; and Mick acted wisely in taking precautions against its recurrence, especially as the obstacles which had confronted him nearly two years back were now more hope-baffling than ever. For the intervening months had not brought the desirable "thrifle more wit" to his unsteady brother Thady, who, on the contrary, was developing into one of those people whose good-for-nothingness is taken as a matter of course even by themselves; and a bolt was thus, so to speak, drawn across Mick's locked door.

He set off betimes on his long ramble. It was a cloudless July morning—the noon of summer by air and light as well as by the calendar. Even the barest tracts of the bogland,

Digitized by Google

which vary their aspect as little as may be from shifting season to season, were flecked with golden furze-blossom, and whitened with streaming tufts of fairy-cotton, and sun-warmed herbs were fragrant underfoot. Mick rather hurried over this stage of his "stravade," partly because he foresaw a blazing hot day, and he wished to be among more broken ground, where there are sheltered hollows scooped in the "knockawns," and cool patches under their bushes and boulders. He entered the region of these things before his shadow had shrunk to its briefest; for not so very far beyond Kilmacrone the smooth floor of the big bog crumples itself into crests and ridges, as if it had caught the trick from its bounding ocean; and the nearer it comes to the shore the higher it heaves itself, until at last it is cut short by a sheer cliff wall, with storm-stunted brambles and furzes cowering along the edge, fathoms above a base-line of exuberant weed and foam. The long sea-frontage of this rock-rampart is fissured by only a few narrow clefts. On the left hand, facing oceanwards, the coast is a labyrinth of mountain-fiords, straits, and bays, where you may see great craggy shoulders and domed summits waver in their crystal calm at the flick of a gull's

Digitized by Google

dipping wing, or add to the terror of the tempest, as they start out black and unmoved behind rifts of swirling mists. On the right there is the same fretwork of land and water, but wrought in less high relief. A tract of lonely strands, where shells and daisies whiten the grass, and pink-belled creepers trail entangled with tawny-podded wrack, across the shingle. You are apt thereabouts to happen on clattering pebble-banks and curling foam, when you are apparently deep among meadows and corn-land, or to come on sturdy green potato-drills round some corner where you had confidently supposed the unstable furrows of the sea. And the intricate ground-plan of the district must be long studied before you can always feel sure whether the low-shelving swarded edges by which you are walking frame salt or fresh water.

Mick was bound eventually for one of those ravines which cleave the cliff's precipitous wall and give access to the shore, generally by a deep-sunken sandy boreen. Here, under a tall bank, there are a couple of cabins, besides another which, having lost its roof, may be reckoned as a half; so that Tullykillagin is not a large place, even as places go in its neighbourhood. He knew, however, that he could count upon get-

Digitized by Google

ting something to eat at either of the two cabins first mentioned, and, indeed, at the bare-raftered one also if, as often chanced, it was occupied by Tim Fottrel, the gatheremup; and this prospect served for an incentive, feeble enough, though it strengthened a little as the hours wore on. So languid, in fact, was his resolution that at one moment he thought he would just sthreel home again without going any further; if he went aisy everybody would have cleared out of Kilmacrone before he got back. But at this time he was sitting among some broom bushes, under which last year's withered black pods were strewn, and he determined that if there were an odd number of seeds in the first one he opened he would go on to Tullykillagin. There were nine in it, and he logically continued to loiter seawards.

He dawdled so much that when he came to the cliff the sun already hung low over the water, and as he walked along the edge, his shadow stretched away far inland across the dappled pale and dark green of the furze-fretted sward. The sea unrolled a ceaseless scroll of faint wild-hyacinth colour, on which invisible breeze-wafts inscribed and erased mysterious curves and strokes like hieroglyphics. Here and there it showed deep purple stains; for a flight of little

Digitized by Google

snowflake clouds were fluttering in from the Atlantic, followed at leisure by deep-folded, glistering drifts, now massed on the horizon-rim to muffle the descending sun. Yet that tide, with all its smoothness, showed a broad band of foam wherever it touched the pebbles, which lay dry before its sliding—for it was on its way in. It had nearly reached the cliff's foot in most places; but Mick presently came to a point where he looked down on a small field of very green grass, set as an oasis between the waves and the walling rock, with a miniature chaos of heaped-up boulders to left and right. A few of them were scattered over it, and even the highest of these wore a scarf of leathery flat sea-ribbon, in token of occasional submergence; but amongst them grew hawthorn and sloe bushes, and a clump of scarlet-tasselled fuchsia. To heighten the incongruity of its aspect, this pasture was inhabited by a large strawberry cow, who seemed to be enjoying the alternate mouthfuls of seaweed and woodbine, which she munched off a thickly-wreathed boulder, untroubled by the fact that the meal bade fair to be her last, since the rising spring tide had already all but cut off access on either hand, and would still flow for some hours.

Digitized by Google

"Musha, now I'll be skivered," said Mick, standing still, "if that's not Joe McEvoy's ould cow. You'll be apt to experience a dampin,' ould woman, if you don't quit out of there. Whethen, it's a quare man he is to lave the baste sthrayin' about permiscuous in the welther of the tide."

He peered over the edge of the cliff, evidently mistrusting its smooth face; and then he threw several stones and clods at the cow, with shouts of "Hi! out of that," and "Shoo along!" but his missiles fell short of their mark, and if his voice reached her, she treated it with the placid disregard of which her kind are mistress on such occasions, and never raised her crumple-horned head.

"Have it your own way, then," said Mick cynically; "it's nothin' to me if you've a mind to thry a taste of swimmin' under wather."

He had not, however, strolled much farther, when he met with somebody who was vastly more concerned about the animal's impending fate. This was old Joe McEvoy himself, who, out of the mouth of a steep sandy boreen, sprang up suddenly, like a Jack-in-the-box,—one of the shock-wigged, saturnine-complexioned pattern. But no Jack-in-the-box could have looked so

Digitized by Google

flurriedly distracted, or have muttered to itself such queer execrations as he did, hobbling along.

"A year's loadin' of bad luck to the whoule of thim!" he was saying with gasps when Mick approached; "there's not a one of thim but 'ud do desthruction on herself sooner than lose a chanst to be annoyin' anybody, if she could conthrive it no other way."

"If it's th' ould cow you're cursin'," said Mick, "she's down below yonder."

"Och, tell me somethin' I dunno, you gomeral, not but what I'm nigh as big a one meself as can be, to go thrust her wid that little imp of mischief. Bad scran to it; I must give me stiff leg a rest, and she'll be up here blatherin' after me before you can look round, you may bet your brogues she will."

"Gomeral yourself and save your penny," said Mick, whose temper was not at its best after his long day of hungry discontent. "And the divil a call you have to be onaisy about the crathur follyin' you anywheres. Stayin' where she is she's apt to be, until she gets the chanst of goin' out to say wid the turn of the tide, and that's like enough to happen her."

"And who at all was talkin' of the cow

Digitized by Google

follyin'? It's ould Biddy Duggan down below that niver has her tongue off of me, nagglin' at me for lettin' the poor crathur pick her bit along the beach, and it a strip of the finest grass in the townland, when it's above wather, just goin' to loss. A couple of pints differ extry it does be makin' in the milkin' of a day she's grazed there. But it's threatenin' dhrownin' and disthruction over it th' ould banshee is this great while; and plased she'll be, rael plased and sot up. Sure that's what goes agin me, to be so far gratifyin' her, and herself as mischevious, harm-hopin' an ould toad as iver I hated the sight of—Och bejabers, didn't I tell you so? It's herself comin' gabble-gobblin' up."

As he spoke, a very small meagre ragged old woman emerged swiftly from the lane, accompanied by one younger and stouter and less nimble of foot, her temporary neighbour, Mrs Gatheremup. Mrs Duggan seemed to bear out Joe's character of her; for now, like Spenser's hag Occasion, "ever as she went her tongue did walk," and the path it took was not one of peace. Maybe, after this happenin', some she could name might have the wit to believe what other people tould

Digitized by Google

them, who knew better than to be thinkin' to feed a misfortnit crathur of an ould cow on sand and sayweed as if she was a sayl or a saygull, and it a scandal to the place to behould her foostherin' along down there wid the waves' edges slitherin' up to her nose, and she sthrivin' to graze, and the slippery stones fit to break her neck. Such was the purport of Mrs Duggan's remarks, which were punctuated by Joe McEvoy's peremptory requests that she would lave gabbin' and givin' impidence, and his appeals to the others to inform him whether they weren't all to be pitied for havin' to put up wid the ould screech-owl's foolish talk.

"Sure, that's the way they do be keepin' it up continial, Micky lad," Mrs Fottrel called to him, shrilly, as if athwart gusts of high wind. "I'll pass you me word the two of them 'ill stand at their doors of an evenin' an give bad langwidge to aich other across the breadth of the road till they have us all fairly moidhered wid the bawls of them, and I on'y wonder the thatch doesn't take and slip down on their ould heads."

"Belike it's lave of the likes of *you* I ought to be axin' where I'm to git grazin' for me own

Digitized by Google

cattle?" a growl of sarcastic thunder was just then observing, to which flashed a scathing response: "And bedad, then, it's lave you had a right to be axin' afore you sent off me poor son Hughey's bit of a Pat, to be wastin' his time mindin' your ould scarecrow and gettin' himself dhrownded in the tide. It's no thanks to you if the innicent child isn't as like as not lyin' this minute under six fut of could wather, instead of fetchin' me in the full of me kettle that I'm roarin' to him for this half-hour, and ne'er a livin' sinner widin sight or——"

"Saints above! is little Pat strayin' along wid the cow?" said Mrs Fottrel, much aghast. "I was noticin' I didn't see him anywheres this evenin'. What's to become of him down there, and it risin' beyond the heighth of iverythin' as fast as it can flow? Sure this mornin' 'twas wallopin' itself agin the wall, back of our place, fit to swally all before it."

"Why didn't you tell me the child was below?" said Mick. "I'd lep down there and fetch him up aisy enough; on'y there was no mortial use goin' after the cow, for ne'er a crathur that took its stand on four hoofs 'ud git its own len'th up the cliff, unless it might be some little divil of a goat. And

Digitized by Google

the wather's dhrowndin'-deep alongside it afore now."

"Musha, good gracious, sure all I done was to bid the spalpeen be keepin' an eye on her now and agin while he would be playin' about there," said Joe; "and it's twinty chances if iver he did at all. Trapesed off wid himself somewheres; he'll be right enough be this time. 'Tisn't the likes of him go to loss, it's the quare five-poun' note he'd fetch at Athenry fair."

"He might ha' broke his legs climbin' disp'rit on the rocks," said Mrs Fottrel, unconvinced by the argument from unsaleability, "and be lyin' there now waitin' for the say-waves to wash the life out of him. Heaven pity the crathur!"

"Sure I'll step down and see what's gone wid him," said Mick.

The descent of the cliff, though not riskless, was no great feat for an active youth, and Mick accomplished it safely, but to little purpose, he thought at first, since the irreclaimable cow appeared to be the sole denizen of the shrinking beach. However, when he had shouted and scrambled for some time without result, he came abruptly upon a nook among the piled-up rocks, where a very small black-headed boy in

Digitized by Google

tattered petticoats was digging the sandy floor with a razor-shell.

"Och, it's there you are," said Mick, stepping down from a weedy ledge; "and what have you in it at all that you didn't hear me bawlin' to you?"

"Throops," said Pat gloatingly, almost too absorbed to glance off his work; "it's Ballyclavvy, the way it did be in the school readin'-book at Duffclane. There's the Roossian guns,"—he pointed to a row of black-mouthed mussel-shells, mounted on periwinkle carriages —"and here's the sides of the valley I'm makin'; long and narrer it was. Just step round and look at it from where I am, Micky, but don't be clumpin' your fut on the French cavalary."

"The divil's in it all," said Mick, with a sudden bitter vehemence, which he accounted for to himself by adding, as he pointed towards the seething white line: "D'you see where that's come to, you little bosthoon? And you sittin' grubbin' away here as if you were pitaty-diggin' a dozen mile inland."

Pat looked in the desired direction, but misapprehended the object to be the western sky, where an overblown fiery rose seemed to

Digitized by Google

have scattered all its petals broadcast. "Sure that's on'y the sun settin' red like," he explained indifferently, and would have resumed his excavations if he had not been seized and hustled half-way up the cliff before he could disengage his mind from his brigades and batteries. Both heads soon bobbed up over the edge without accident; for Pat climbed like a monkey when once he had grasped the situation. His grandmother's attitude towards Joe McEvoy constrained her to receive him effusively as prey snatched from the foaming jaws of death; but it was out of Mrs Fottrel's pocket that a peppermint drop came to sweetly seal his new lease of life.

"And what are you after now, Mick?" she said, observing that, instead of drawing himself up to level ground, he stood poised on an uncomfortable perch, and looked back the steep way he had come.

"I'm thinkin' to slip down agin," he said, "and see if be any manner of manes I could hurоosha th' ould baste round the rocks yonder. The wather mightn't be altogether too deep there yit; at all evints she's between the divil and the deep say where she is now; it's just a chanst."

Digitized by Google

"Sorra a much," said Joe disconsolately, "scarce worth breakin' your bones after, any way."

"Bones, how are you? Sure, there's no call to be breakin' bones in the matter," said Mick, beginning to descend. This was true enough, if he had minded what he was about; but then he did not. So far from it, he was saying to himself: "One 'ud ha' thought now she might ha' took a sort of pride in it," when the bottom of the world seemed to drop away from under his feet, and his irrelevant meditations ended in a shattering thud down on the rocky pavement a long way below. He never heard the shouts and shrieks which the incident occasioned above his head. Once only he became dimly conscious of a quivering network of prismatic flashes, which he could not see through, and a booming throb in his ears, which made him murmur dazedly: "Wirra, I thought I'd got beyond hearin' of them drums." In another moment: "What's took me?" he said, with a start. But the depths he sank among remain always dark and silent.

Next day messengers from Tullykillagin told Mrs Doherty that the Lord had took her son Mick, and that "he had gone out to say wid

Digitized by Google

the tide, before they could get anybody to him, and there was no tellin' where he might be swep' up, if ever he came to shore at all."

"And the quarest part of it was that Joe McEvoy's ould cow that he went after had legged herself up, somehow, on the rocks out of reach, and niver a harm on her when they found her in the mornin'. But she'd been all of a could quiver ever since, and himself doubted if she'd rightly git over it,—might the divil mend her, and she after bein' the death of a fine young man. Sure, every sowl up at Tully-killagin was rael annoyed about it. Even ould Biddy Duggan, that was as cross-tempered as a weasel, did be frettin' for the lad; and Joe McEvoy was sittin' crooched like an ould wet hen, over his fire black out, that he hadn't the heart to be lightin'."

Mrs Doherty said she didn't know what talk they had of the Lord and the say and the ould cow; but she'd known well enough the way it was when Mick niver come home last night. He'd just took off after the souldiers, as he'd a great notion one time.

She was, as may have been observed, rather a dull-witted woman, and proportionately hard to convince against her will.

Digitized by Google

"A great notion intirely," she said; "on'y I'd scarce have thought he'd go do such a thing on me in arnest. And I runnin' away indoors yisterday out of the heighth of the divarsion, when the band-music was a thrate to be hearin', just to see his bit of supper wouldn't be late on him. And the grand little pitaty-cake I had for him; I may be throwin' it to the hins now, unless Molly might fancy a bit; for we'll not be apt to set eyes on him this three year. Och wirra! and he that contint at home, and ne'er a word out of him about the souldierin' this long while. If it had been poor Thady itself, 'twould ha' been diff'rint; but Mick—I'd scarce ha' thought it of him; for he'd a dale of good-nature, Mrs Geoghegan, ma'am."

"He had so, tub-be sure, woman dear," said Mrs Geoghegan, "or he might be sittin' warm in here this minnit."

"The back of me hand to thim blamed ould throopers," said Mrs Doherty, "that sets the lads wild wid their thrampin' around."

"Poor Mick would be better wid them than where he is now—God have mercy on his soul," said a neighbour solemnly.

But Mick's mother continued to bewail her-

Digitized by Google

self: "And I missin' the best of all the tunes they played, so Molly was tellin' me, for 'fraid he'd be kep' waitin' for his supper, and he comin' home to me hungry; and now—— There's a terrible len'th of time in three year. I wouldn't ha' believed he'd ha' done it on me."

Digitized by Google

AFTER SEVEN YEARS

LOOKING southward from the strand at Clonalty, you can see Wade's house still making an opaque white gleam at the sharp-pointed end of the sandy spit, which, a wedge of silver and green on sunny days, thrusts itself out from the opposite shore into the shallow-rippling estuary. Viewed from such a distance, its aspect is just that of the other whitewashed cabins, which are dotted about on the Clonalty side; but at closer quarters, signs of its many years' desertion peer out of its small blank windows, and perch on its too-ruffled thatch, and rustle in its deep border of weeds. These latter are not so luxuriant a growth as they would be in most places, because the soil of the little peninsula is so nearly pure sand that vegetation has a hard struggle on it for a stunted existence. Old Billy Wade used to have the work of the world over his potato-patch, which, however, in most years did much credit to his admixture of "care-

Digitized by Google

ful dirt." All about it the sand spreads unadulterated, heaving and sinking in hillocks and hollows, where little grows except dry grey-green bent grasses, which look as if they had been withered in some earlier state of life, and, close to the water's edge, tufts of faint-coloured sea-pinks, whose very scent is faded. In wild weather the flying sand tinkled against the panes like fine-ground hail, and made sloping drifts in the sills of window and door. From the landward side the cottage is approached (very seldom) by a rude track sunken between high banks, which come slipping down in spreading slides if anybody scrambles up them, in hopes of finding firmer ground a-top, so that he gets there with many additional grains in his gritty shoes. A few perches from the door this track dips down to the shore at a place which is a miniature bay at full tide. At other times it is a quicksand, and since, long ago, one Larry Keogh's stray horse blundered into it and was swallowed up, it became locally known as Larry's horse-pond. Nowadays the shadow of a more tragical event broods over it, but it keeps the old name.

Inhabitants of Clonalty have been heard to express their belief that the tide comes in there

Digitized by Google

only once a week or so; and undoubtedly its visits to this extreme end of the long sea-arm are of but brief duration, scarcely more protracted than an orthodox morning call. During the greater part of the four and twenty hours a brown flat lies between shore and shore, looking as if nothing could be simpler than to tramp across it. Moderately prudent people, however, do not attempt the passage, for it is full of "quick" and "soft" places, death-traps which have from time to time taken a victim, who has left nothing behind him except his name to commemorate the disaster. Murphy's and Dowling's and Cassidy's respective "holes" are a salutary warning to unwary walkers. The Wades, therefore, and their few visitors had to go a long step round on the way to and from Clonalty, and as the mainland at their back was for several miles mostly sand-hills, where the residents were chiefly rabbits, the cottage was a lonesome place to live in, and as inconvenient, Mrs Wade used to complain on market-days, "as the desert of the wilderness, with every hap'orth you wanted to be carried from the world's end." In fact, the residence offered scanty attractions to anybody save old Billy Wade, whose heart was usually in his lobster-

Digitized by Google

pots, or at the end of his fishing-lines, and who, paddling off complacently, whenever the tide served, in his broad-bottomed black boat to see after them, spent at least half his time afloat. Often he took his only child Hannah along with him, a proceeding to which his wife objected more and more as the girl grew old enough to be serviceable and companionable indoors. But her objections were always over-ruled by Hannah, who had no taste for domestic affairs, and who was so thoroughly spoilt that she knew she need only dance desperately on the water's edge to make her father pull back for her, no matter how nearly he had got out of sight. This had happened on occasions when he had tried to slip away unbeknownst, thinking the weather doubtful. Her mother said she was as stubborn as a young buffalo-bull—an animal of whose dispositions she can have had no personal experience—when she took a notion into her head; but Hannah was not a whit abashed by the comparison, nor moved to relinquish her voyages, and Mrs Wade's discontent with her dwelling had many a long solitary day in which to strike deeper roots.

So when old Billy Wade died, just about Hannah's fifteenth birthday, everybody thought

Digitized by Google

that his widow would surely quit the sandy peninsula, and seek some less isolated home. But everybody was mistaken, for, on the contrary, Mrs Wade stayed on at the cottage, and in six months married Mr Miles Roche, whom she had met at Crutwell the lawyer's office, where she had gone on business. This marriage was probably the first step of any importance that she had ever ventured on spontaneously in all her life; as the match with Billy Wade, thirty years her senior, had been made up for her quite independently, and ever since she had taken her orders dutifully from husband and child. Unfortunately, it could not be called a prudent measure. Miles Roche was a middle-aged man, whose journey through the world had all been downhill. He had started in life as a sort of squireen, his family being just on the borderland of quality, not over well reputed, and with steadily dwindling resources. Towards maintaining himself in even this position young Miles had never done anything more to the purpose than drink rather too much whisky, and lose what money he could at horse-races, and other events chronicled in the sporting intelligence. These pursuits he carried on industriously

Digitized by Google

enough, though on a small scale, during a long series of years, and the process of deterioration, physical, moral, and social, which they involved was leisurely and gradual. But at last bad times and other adverse circumstances began to co-operate with them, and his decline then became more rapid, so that by the time when Mrs Wade, in her new black clothes, passed him lounging on Crutwell's steps, he had, as his neighbours expressed it, "lost himself entirely." By this they meant that he had sunk out of the class in which birth had placed him. Time was when he had walked with something of a swagger over his own fields, among his own not very thriving flocks and herds, and had ridden, on rather sorry nags, to the meets of the Harveystown Hunt, where he could, without undue presumption, join the party at the breakfast, spread for all acquaintances by old Colonel Meade of Meade Court. Nowadays, though he still kept his swagger, except when his gait was controlled by influences more potent than self-conceit, not a rood of land remained in his possession, not a four-footed beast owned him for master, not a hat was touched to him in the country-side, and Peter Molloy, of the general shop, dropped the

Digitized by Google

"mister" as often as not when asking him gruffly if he was thinking of settling that account. In fact, Miles Roche had degenerated into a needy loafer, who felt in no way above his company of a Saturday night at Donnelly's bar, whither resident labourers brought their dole of wages, and passing tramps their more variable gains. And his pride had so far fallen with his fortunes, that he did not disdain the expedient of mending them by a marriage with old Billy Wade's widow, who was reported to have been richly left in a small way. The old man had, so rumour ran, both inherited and amassed savings of indefinite amount — some said "pounds," and some said "hundreds." Everybody said, "There was never a one of the Wades yet but was as close and naygurly as could be consaived." "Sure, the money stuck to them," Peter Molloy averred, "like the flies on a dhrop of treckle." These considerations were undoubtedly the mainspring of Miles' design, though Mrs Wade's faded sea-pink-like prettiness may have helped to bring about his eventual perseverance in it. For her part she felt that she had drawn a prize. Miles was big and burly, and by any friendly observer might still have been described as a fine figure of a

Digitized by Google

man, especially when he had on the respectable hat and coat, which he had borrowed, and the new scarf, which he had bought on credit, to do his "coortin'" in. His manners, too, could be, upon occasion, softly insinuating, and had not wholly lost the stamp of his better days. Perhaps this is nearly all that could be said in his favour; but it sufficed to make Mrs Wade a proud woman the first time she walked through Clonalty with Miles Roche as her accepted suitor, and this albeit she was well aware how many of the neighbours were of the same opinion which old Mrs Cleary, who, having attained to "a won'erful great age entirely," could say anything she liked, expressed with much candour in lieu of congratulations. It ran as follows: "Ay, woman dear, but it's the quare gaby you're about makin' of yourself, takin' up wid that big slouchin' son of ould Charley Roche, that was good for little enough himself. Sure, he'll be dhrinkin' you out of house and home as fast as the say flows, and sorra a bit 'ill you pacify him wid it all—not if you had the full of it to be givin' him."

Nevertheless, willing as she was to be wooed, the negotiations all but fell through when, upon

Digitized by Google

more exact enquiry, Miles ascertained that the widow's fortune had been grossly exaggerated, as she really possessed an income of dimensions which prescribe the plainest of plain living, and only a life interest in the little bit of property that produced it. The discovery, as I have said, nearly terminated the courtship, and quite put an end to all its pleasantness. For the mixture of motives which determined Miles to fulfil his promise was only just strong enough to effect this, without leaving any margin for a good grace. His disappointment, indeed, sometimes expressed itself with such brutal frankness that Mrs Wade now and then wished, before the wedding day arrived, for strength of mind to pluck up a spirit, and send him about his business. But Mrs Roche reiterated the wish much more fervently when it was too late; and in course of time the sentiment became as habitual as her husband's alternations of uproarious frenzy and ferocious gloom. For Miles's unsteadiness increased from year to year, until she grew to regard the remote situation of their cottage as an advantage, because it withdrew them beyond the neighbours' close observation of their miserable life. It could not, however, remain a secret, and at length wore

Digitized by Google

into so open a one that she could bewail herself with little reserve to sympathising matrons on market-days.

Now it is tolerably certain that none of these things would have come to pass if Hannah Wade had been living with her mother. Her will, though only fifteen years old, would effectually have asserted itself against that of her elders, and Miles Roche's suit would have been short and unsuccessful. But Hannah had moped and fretted so after her father's death, that she had been sent to stay for a change with his sister away at Lettercrum. There she received the news of the match with an intense wrath, which her mother trembled at, even in remote imagination. For a few days following, she was haunted with apprehensions of her daughter's immediate return to upbraid and prohibit; but it presently appeared that the girl's indignation had taken the shape of a resolve to stay away permanently; and during more than five years she never set foot next or nigh Clonalty. At the end of that time, her stepfather's habits took a turn for the worse, leading him to behave in a manner which the Clonalty folk described as "beyond the beyonds altogether;" while her mother, who, according to

Digitized by Google

the same authorities, was "to be pitied wid the drunken baste, the crathur," fell ill, and wrote miserably, begging Hannah to come home.

Whereupon, one thundery summer evening, Hannah Wade arrived with the mail-bags and two or three packages, on Patsy Flood's car. She had grown into a tall, stalwart lass of twenty or so, with black hair and black eyebrows ruled very straight over her dark grey eyes, which looked clear and resolute. Neighbours who saw her pass along the street, remarked among themselves that "yon looked to be a fine, clever, sturdy girl, and Miles Roche was maybe apt to find he'd met wid somebody who'd make him behave himself a thrifle more dacint; he was aisy enough frightened, for all his crackin' and braggin', whenever he'd raison to know he wouldn't be put up wid." And they added that it would be "a rael charity if he was purvinted of bargin' and bullyraggin' the misfort'nit little ould wisp of a woman, who'd been the great fool to have anythin' to say to the likes of him."

However, as it turned out, Hannah had very little opportunity for testing her powers of coercion, as the day but one after her return,

Digitized by Google

Miles Roche suddenly disappeared, and Clonalty saw him no more. Where he had taken himself off to nobody wasted much time in conjecturing. The neighbours were unanimously of the opinion that he was apt to be after no good, and that the best thing could have happened his wife and step-daughter was to be rid of him. Sometimes they congratulated Hannah jocularly upon the promptitude which she had shown in "puttin' him out of it," but the pleasantry was not apparently to her taste. This was when Mrs Roche and her daughter had quitted their old home, and settled in Dunphy's Row at Clonalty, which they did only a week after the event. Mrs Roche was down-hearted and complaining, a state probably due to her bad health, rather than to regret at her desertion, since it was obvious that she would be far better off as a widow bewitched, if she were allowed to remain so. Mrs Tuohy and Mrs Maguire, now her next-door neighbours, used to drop in occasionally and tell her re-assuringly of their conviction that she would never be troubled with setting eyes on him again: "For as like as anythin' he'd run off to the States, and at all events, he wouldn't be very long drinkin' himself out of this world, the way he was goin' on

Digitized by Google

when he quit." But Mrs Roche did not respond with much cordiality to their well-meant consolations. In fact, both she and her daughter showed a disposition to keep themselves to themselves, which is a very sure way of laying one's conduct and character open to hostile criticism.

During her stay with her aunt, Hannah had forsaken her out-of-door life, and learned to sit for long hours over embroidery and other needlework. But now she resumed her earlier more active habits, and saw little daylight indoors. Her boating, however, had come to an end, and she never cared to go near the shore, where her father's old *Mary Anne* might still be seen afloat, owned now by Micky Devlin, to whom Miles Roche had sold her at a price which did not keep him in whisky for the inside of a week. Hannah's occupation lay inland among the hedge-screened fields and lanes, where the sea betrays its neighbourhood only by sending flocks of snowy gulls to gleam through the black cloud of crows that hover in the wake of the sliding ploughshare. At first she weeded and picked stones, and did other such field work in a flapping sunbonnet, but after a while the Cochranes up at Donamoate Farm employed

Digitized by Google

her about their dairy: and it was there that she made the acquaintance of their nephew Francis Conroy.

Yet nearly seven years had gone by since her return to Clonalty, when her great day dawned upon her. That is to say, Francis Conroy proposed and was accepted. Some of the neighbours, indeed, maintained the opinion that it was no fault of hers he'd been so long over his courting. It wasn't, they said, for want of getting every encouragement. Ay, bedad, she'd done some of it for him; trouble enough she'd took, and maybe she'd got no such great things after all. Commentaries of this kind, however, were only to be expected under the circumstances, and they neither had nor merited any weight with the community at large. On the same principle these critics averred that it was downright ridiculous of a young chap like Francey Conroy to be thinking of a girl like Hannah Wade, who was growing old as fast as a dog could trot. They wondered he didn't ask old Batt Hearn's sister Judy while he was about it. The innuendo contained in this sarcasm had only a very slender foundation in facts, for the disparity of age between the sweethearts did not exceed a couple of

Digitized by Google

years, and Hannah's dark comeliness was of a sort that wore well and had lost nothing with the passing of her first youth. As for the young man himself, he was a straight-featured, curly-haired lad, of a rather slight make than otherwise, both physically and mentally, whose worst enemies, just then the people who would have liked to call him son-in-law, found nothing seriously bad that they could call him instead with any plausibility. He worked with his uncle Arthur Cochrane, who, being childless, would, it was confidently expected, do something for him — stock a little farm, maybe. Altogether, no dispassionate onlookers could deny that Hannah was in luck, and they generally said so with the addition that she was "a dacint hard-workin' girl, and apt enough to make the lad a good wife."

It was on a warm long-lighted summer evening that Francis spoke out: just when they were bundling up the last row of lap-cocks in the shady corner of Little Fortyfurzes. At first she felt as if she must be dreaming; and then as if she had never had anything but dreams until that very moment. Glad she was to waken from some of them. When she went home a while later through the hushed meadows,

Digitized by Google

her heart was as full of rest and calm as the soft air was full of the scent of dewy hay. A more rapturous and jubilant mood might have been expected in her by anybody acquainted with her somewhat strenuous and stirring ways. Hannah did not take life easily. Only that morning a fellow-worker had said to her remonstrantly: "It's yourself's the quare onaisy crathur, Hannah Wade. If you're not doin' one thing, you're doin' another. I declare to goodness, one might think the Old Fellow himself was drivin' you; but if I was you I'd give him the go by now and agin anyway." Thus a spell of quietude may have been her most needed and enjoyable refreshment. But as the days went by, her spirits did begin to rise above the level of serenity. She felt not simply at peace with all the world, but also entrenched in a position where she need fear no challenge nor assault from any quarter, not even from Fortune, whom she had long accounted her foe. Therefore she only laughed good-humouredly, and said, sure people would be talking when some officious clashbag repeated to her the sundry strictures upon her engagement. And she accepted the congratulations of her acquaintances with cordiality, as if they pleased her and

Digitized by Google

she had no wish to shun them. She actually asked Mrs Coleman to step in and see her mother on the way back from Mass, a thing she had never been known to do before in all the years they had lived in Dunphy's Row. "You might ha' thought," somebody once had said, affronted, "that every fut in at their ould door was a penny out of their pockets, they were that delicate about lettin' a person inside it." To which somebody else naturally had rejoined: "That there was no such great things to be seen when you got there, as Thady Bourke said when the train he was travellin' on stopped in the middle of the dark tunnel."

Mrs Roche, too, in her little old woman's degree, was cheered and pleased by the event. She had long been an ailing, complaining person, whose grey days had often taken a bleak east-windy atmosphere from a certain austere constraint in Hannah's demeanour towards her. But now happiness substituted for this an unwonted softness and geniality, and Francis Conroy, dropping in of an evening, was found by his mother-in-law elect to be "very friendly and agreeable." So that she took heart of grace, and ventured upon several small sayings and doings from which she had been refraining

Digitized by Google

for fear of a rebuff. For instance, she rearranged all the crockery on the dresser, and she remarked that if Hannah had had any sense, she'd ha' reared a brood of turkey-poults; there was nothing so profitable of a dry saison, and they might ha' got a grand run in Saunder's bit of stubble. To which Hannah responded hopefully: "Ah, sure, you may ha' turkeys and all manner yit." Then the Cochranes, whose liking of the match was an important and somewhat doubtful point, proved to be well affected, and did talk of giving a hand with stocking a little farm. Altogether, the hot haymaking fortnight which followed was made up of halcyon days for both daughter and mother, with many hopes hatching unmolested. But at the end of that time a shadow and a ripple came by, nothing of much consequence indeed, yet it broke up the season of calm weather.

One evening Francis Conroy, who had been working for the day away at Portallen, found himself towards sunset on the shore, where a high-brimmed tide quivering its clearness under the green cliff-shadow tempted him and three or four comrades to take a dip. It was one half of the mishap that he left his much-

Digitized by Google

prized watch in the pocket of his vest, and the completion of it that Bob Flynn, when they were dressing, picked up the garment, unaware of its valuable freight, and tossed it across a deep pool to the rock-ledge whereon Francis stood aghast. For during the transit there was a silvery flash, fleeting as the jump of a trout, a dismayed howl from Francis, and the watch had vanished irretrievably, sunk among oozy rock-crannies in many fathoms of water. The loss was a serious one in those times when a watch cost a couple of months' wages; and Francis bemoaned himself over it next morning to Hannah and all his friends coming and going to Mass. He seemed much depressed all the afternoon, and when she asked him if he was going to play hurley, he replied mournfully: "'Deed no, and me wid me poor grandfather's good watch sittin' there at the bottom of the say, beyond raich of man or mortal, unless them little ugly crabs skytin' over it." Hannah was disposed to think it a harsh and inscrutable decree of Fate that Francey Conroy should lack anything he desired, and she would blithely have despoiled a whole constellation to provide him with what he wanted. But this measure being out of her power, she began

Digitized by Google

to frame a resolve, one which, a few weeks before, would have seemed dreadfully impossible to her, and which even now needed all her newly-acquired sense of security and belief in good luck to make it look practicable.

Monday morning was as warm and bright as ever, and when the Egans' cochin china cock roused Mrs Roche at an early hour, she woke up to it with no presentiment of trouble. The hot weather always made her feeble and lazy, a state which she herself described as not being worth tuppence, and she thought she would lie where she was, in the recess beside the hearth, until she had had her cup of tay, to the arrival of which she looked forward with drowsy patience as a pleasant conclusion to a series of many naps. But it came to her along with a terrible announcement, which set the cup and saucer clattering in her hand more violently than a moderate shock of earthquake would have done. "I was thinkin'," Hannah said, carelessly, as she stood by the little square window, and twitched a yellow leaf or so off the geranium plants which filled it, "I might maybe take a run over to the ould place there this mornin', and fetch back me father's watch out of it."

Digitized by Google

There was a dead silence for a few moments, and then Mrs Roche said in a slow, dull way, as if she were still half-stunned: "Ah no—to be sure you wouldn't ever go for to do such a thing."

"And what for wouldn't I then?" said Hannah, "it's the greatest pity to have a grand watch lyin' there all these years stuck in an ould crevice, like a dead beetle—supposin' it isn't stole out of the place before now wid some tramp passin' by."

"And so it is, long ago, you may depind—stole away it would be," said Mrs Roche, with a clutch at the idea. "Sorra a bit of it you'd git wid goin'. Och be aisy, for God's sake, and let it alone."

"It's aisy talkin' that way," said Hannah, "but all the while it's maybe lyin' there just to me hand, you may say; and—other people at a loss for it . . . And I'm thinkin' it's a quare way to be servin' a thing me poor father was after givin' me in a prisint."

"Oh ay, and it's fine talk *you* have about your poor father and prisints," said Mrs Roche, bitterly, "and I knowin' as well as if I was inside of you this minute, that you're on'y wantin' to get it to give to Francey Conroy.

Digitized by Google

Och, but there's plenty of fools in this world."

"And meself was one of them, then," said Hannah, "that I didn't take care to bring me watch over meself, instead of trustin' it to you. But sure who'd ever ha' thought you could conthrive to forget it—and it the raison of the whole thing happenin'—unless you left it behind on purpose maybe."

"I wish it was lyin' at the bottom of the say," said Mrs Roche, "and meself along wid it, the way I wouldn't be hearin' you talkin' of destroyin' us this black day."

"Whist, whisht, mother, and don't be sayin' such things," said Hannah. "'Deed now, ne'er a word would I ha' tould you about the matter, on'y I amn't clear in me mind which side of the fireplace you had it kep' in, so I thought I'd ax you first. But a fut I won't go after it, if you think that bad of it—there now. I'll let it stop where it is, goin' to loss, and gettin' stolen, if that 'ill satisfy you. I dunno what notion you have about bein' destroyed. Howane'er, I'll let it alone."

But Mrs Roche said: "Goin' you'll be for sure and for sartin, goodness may pity the two of us. What notion have I? Och, I couldn't

Digitized by Google

be tellin' you—I dunno. But goin' you'll be and destroyin' us, that I know right well."

This, and the like, she continued to reiterate, and Hannah found counter-protestations on her part as ineffectual as they would have been against some low-moaning wind that had come keening about the house. At last, in hopes that deeds might prove more convincing than words, she took out a long neglected strip of white embroidery, and sat down to stitch at her over-casting. She had given up her dairy-work in favour of her wedding-clothes, and was meditating an expedition to the shops of Glasmena; however, she said to herself that she had better stay at home this morning and keep her mother pacified. "I won't torment her, if she's that set against it," she thought, with an impatient regret at the weakness which had been, no doubt, the cause of her mother's whim, and was a reason for humouring it. Yet she was not perhaps without a sense of relief and escape in deciding thus.

But when they had finished their early dinner, to which Mrs Roche got up disconsolate, Hannah grew so thoroughly tired of her long morning indoors, that she felt as if she must run out for a bit into the strong

Digitized by Google

sunshine that was making veined green transparencies of the geranium leaves in the window, and dulling the embers on the hearth into a wreath of pink and white blossom. She had really for the time being forgotten all about the watch; but when her mother saw her get up and put her grey shawl over her head, she groaned despairingly and said: "She's goin'—Holy Virgin, she's goin', for all I could do or say—cruel headstrong, she always was, goodness forgive her, and now the Lord knows what she'll bring on us wid it." This reminded Hannah again of the plan which she had given up, and at the same time proved that her renunciation had failed in its object; and she flung angrily out of the house without replying. Just at the door she heard her mother calling her, but she ran down the street and did not look back.

The little old woman, left comfortless, sat a while crouched in the shadowiest corner of the dimly-lit room, beyond the reach of the longest sunbeam. One might have fancied that she was hiding from some dreadful thing; but whatever it was had got at too close quarters with her to be thus eluded. Then, as the glowing afternoon wore on, she grew

Digitized by Google

drowsy and chilly, and thought she would cheer herself with a cup of tea, only the big black kettle seemed so heavy that it was not worth the trouble of lifting, and she lay down instead under her scarlet-diamonded patch-work quilt, where sleep presently accepted her invitation, and with it dreams that came unbidden.

Dunphy's Row lies at the foot of a gentle slope that shuts out the shore, but a few perches up the road the sea comes into sight. Hannah went first in the opposite direction—to the Cochranes' to see if there was anything she could do in the dairy, her successor having turned out an inefficient person, and being spoken of by her superiors as "that great gawk." But Mrs Cochrane said: "Ah, no thank you, kindly, Hannah, there'll be nothin' wantin' to-night. The pans is just sittin' and gatherin' paiceable, and that great gawk can't hinder them of doin' that anyways, so long as she lets them alone—and I've got the kay of the door safe in me pocket. The hay's all up, and Francey's went off somewheres wid his gun, after the rabbits I'm thinkin'." So Hannah said: "It's the worth of him;" and soon turned back seawards.

Digitized by Google

On a sun-bright day when there are many little foam-crests curling between the swarded shores, and glistering cloudlets flit by, Clonalty looks very blue and white and green. It was doing so when Hannah came to the beach, for a high tide had flowed in further than usual, and ripples were sparkling and bickering among swathes of tangled wrack that had long lain dry and stirless. As she looked across the water she saw, just opposite, her old home gleaming with its white back-wall, for it faces away from the sea; and to left and right lay the silvery hollows of the sand-hills. Ever since she had run away from her mother's call she had been wishing more and more eagerly to make the venture, to visit the deserted house, and reclaim from it the long forgone bit of property, the gold watch and chain which her father had given to her on his death-bed, and which she believed to be still hidden in the wall-niche where her mother had by a strange oversight left it behind at the time of their flitting. They had come away hurriedly one still, wet July evening, when the grey water was fretted with large drops, and the mist trailed thick and low. Seven years were past since then, and they had never made the

Digitized by Google

same journey, nor talked nor thought of doing so, not even in the first dismay of the discovery that the watch was missing. But now Hannah, for more than one reason, was of a different mind. Francis Conroy was coming to see her that evening, and she imagined a delightful moment if she could surprise him with the gift of a watch in place of his lost one—a gold watch and a real silver chain, whereas he had hitherto had nothing better than a makeshift contrived out of an old curb bit. The possibility had flashed into her mind when, on bidding him good-night the evening before, he had remarked dejectedly that it might be any hour at all for anything he could tell, unless he could go look under the waves of the sea. Whereupon she had allowed herself to drop a mysterious hint that he might be owning a better one than ever he had yet before long. Francey, she thought, had not minded her; but the remembrance made her all the more anxious to carry out her design. "Me mother's safe to be thinkin' all the while I'm gone over, whether or no," she said to herself, "and if I could get hould of a boat, I'd be there and back in no time at all."

So thinking, she became aware that her

Digitized by Google

father's old boat was moored close by, its black shape the one blot on the glittering blue, white and green, with its present owner, old Micky Devlin, and his wife sunning themselves on the little boatslip at the water's edge. Hannah reflected for another minute, and then ran down to them. "I wonder, ma'am," she said to Mrs Devlin, "would himself think bad of loanin' me the boat for half an hour maybe? I was wantin' to slip over yonder." This request was conveyed to Micky by his wife, her familiar cracked voice alone being easily accessible to his bothered ears. But in answer he only said, with a many-wrinkled grin: "Ah, dear, and is it himself she's expeckin' to meet over there?" Hannah gave a great start, and turned from scarlet to white so quickly that Mrs Devlin said remonstrantly to her husband: "Arrah, man, don't be talkin' ridic'lous. It's glad enough we are to get shut of the likes of yous now and agin, let me tell you, widout any notion of runnin' after yous over land and say—cock you up! Sure never mind him, Hannah."

"Well, for the matter of that, I'd pull her over meself, if she's wishful; the tide 'ill take us backwards and forrards handy," said Micky,

Digitized by Google

waiving the point. He had two motives in making the offer. For he was glad to grasp an excuse for getting afloat on a day when no fishing could be pleaded, and holding decidedly antiquated views about the capabilities of womenkind, he regarded the suggestion that a lass should handle his boat herself with a disfavour which would have made him loth to grant her request in its original form. "Come along wid you, then," he said, putting his pipe into his pocket, and scrambling away over the clattering stones. Hannah looked after him doubtfully for a moment, and then followed.

Old Mrs Devlin remained where she was, knitting away at her coarse grey sock, her quick needles glancing in and out of it like lightning at play about a sullen cloud. As the boat pushed off she called after it: "Don't be delayin' too long, or you might stick fast comin' home." And her husband replied: "Ay, bedad, the tide runs out wid itself that treacherous, before you know where you are, you might as well be offerin' to row through a bit of wet bog." But Hannah, looking back wistfully to where the old woman sat placidly turning her heel, felt herself little disposed to linger over that errand.

Digitized by Google

On this same afternoon, Francis Conroy, as we have heard, had gone out shooting. The sand-hills were his hunting-grounds, and their abounding rabbits his quarry, in the pursuit of which he had no luck. In every case the scurry and whisk occurred so punctually that the pellets plopped fruitlessly into the sand like over-impetuous hail. By the time that his ammunition was running out he had come along, doubling round the head of the estuary, till he was near the Wades' deserted cottage. Then it struck him that he was thirsty, and that there must have been water somewhere about the premises. Accordingly, he sought out a badly choked-up well in the precincts of the obliterated garden, and having taken a brackish draught sparingly, he perched himself with dangling legs on a ledged bank which commanded a reach of the little lane running between the cottage door and Larry's Horse-pond.

As he sat looking idly round him in the lengthening rays, a faint cloud of discontent was on his countenance. He was considering some unredressed grievances, amongst which his submerged watch just then lay uppermost, because he was at the same time considering

Digitized by Google

what o'clock it might be. Presently a sand-muffled tread sounded close by, and a shadow came wavering round the turn of the sunken boreen. Following it came a figure, which at once impressed Francis as somehow familiar, and which he speedily identified only too surely. It was no other than Miles Roche, reeling along just as he probably had reeled home on that very road many an evening before his abrupt departure. Though Francis had not set eyes on him for the last seven years, their acquaintance was too old a one for any mistakes to be possible now, especially as his absence had seemingly left him unchanged. Thick-set frame and threadbare suit, battered hat and red, coarsened face, all had just the same aspect as when they were last seen lounging in front of Donnelly's. Equally characteristic was the unsteadiness of his steps as he lurched along between the shelving banks, till, with a stumble at the threshold, and a resentful roar, he vanished into the dark doorway of the cottage. Francis watched his progress with an expression of deepening disgust, for this unexpected reappearance of his future step-father-in-law opened a long vista of mortifying annoyance. "It's the fine

Digitized by Google

times we'll be havin' wid him—he didn't lead them the life of a dog, be all accounts. Och, bad luck to you, you drunken baste," he said to himself, as the sound of a thick voice bawling came from the cottage, where Miles Roche was apparently soliloquising in a bad temper. Being minded to postpone the renewal of their acquaintance, Francis thought he would take himself off before the other emerged, and he was getting up to go when another surprising appearance stopped him. He saw Hannah Wade come through the cottage door, which was perhaps fifty yards from him, and stand outside it, where in a minute she was joined by her mother. And this was astonishing indeed, since, to his certain knowledge, Mrs Roche had not left her house once in the past twelvemonth, not even to creep as far as Mass; and she had of late been more than usually complaining. How, then, had she got here, and what was she doing? Taken in connection with the return of her husband, her presence was all the stranger. Had she and Hannah known of it beforehand? In that case, Francis thought, Hannah "had a right to ha' tould him, instead of to be lettin' on they were quit of the ould

Digitized by Google

rapscallion for good and all—'twould ha' been only fairity. It was no sort of thing for Hannah to have done. But as for the ould woman bein' over there, that wasn't better able to travel than a jelly-fish off the shore, he didn't know what to say to it at all."

In the midst of his conjectures, puzzled and indignant, Hannah and her mother withdrew into the cottage, and then he began to ask himself whether he should not join them there. They might have come over to fetch something, and want a helping hand; or their tipsy relation might become troublesome and violent, though for the time being he seemed to have fallen quiet. He was still hesitating between the promptings of chivalry, edged with curiosity, and his reluctance to hurry on his introduction to this undesired family connection, when Hannah and her mother reappeared in the doorway.

It seemed to him that he had surmised their errand rightly, for they were hauling along between them a large, unwieldy looking bundle, wrapped in folds of some weather-beaten stuff, which might have been an old sail. It was evidently a heavy, cumbrous burden, beyond their powers to lift — they

Digitized by Google

could only tug and pull it. But Francis observed that Mrs Roche appeared to exert far more strength in dragging it over the threshold than anybody would have supposed her to possess. "Faith, then, herself's the great little ould schemer, lyin' there at home lettin' on she's scarce able to breathe, and as limbersome as a sandhopper when she takes the fancy. Bedad you're well mended, ma'am," he said to himself, watching her activity with a certain dissatisfaction. A few paces outside both women paused to rest, and Hannah standing up straight and tall, twisted together her thick black locks, which had shaken loose, and wound them round her head, just as he had seen her do the other day in the hayfield. But she looked, he fancied, slimmer and more girlish than usual, perhaps only by reason of the rough task she had set herself. He was jumping up to go and help, when she said a word to her mother, and ran back into the cottage. She came out again immediately with something in her hand; something that flickered a fierce cold gleam in the warm sunlight; it was a long, broad-bladed knife, such as is used for cutting up meat. This she thrust out of sight swiftly in among the

Digitized by Google

folds of the wrapping cloth, and he heard her say: "Now come on—make haste."

Francis could not have accounted rationally for the feeling of helpless horror which at this moment came over him; but it did seize him with such paralysing effect that, if a quicksand had been making mouths all round him, he could have stirred hand nor foot to escape from his peril. Like one in a dream he sat watching mother and daughter toil along with their load, whatever it might be. For a few yards the track ran straight towards the place where he sat, and as they came nearer he could hear the older woman panting and groaning over her efforts—"We'll never do it, Hannah," she repeated again and again, "the Saints have mercy on us—we'll never do it." Hannah made no answer, and was stooping so low that he could not see her face; but she tugged desperately. The ponderous weight furrowed the loose sand as it passed trailing on, and a brisk breeze, which seemed to be blowing after them, sent a thin cloud scudding by, but where Francis sat not a breath was stirring except his own. They were in full view of him as they approached, but they did not notice him, and when they

Digitized by Google

came where the sunken boreen turned rather sharply to the left, the high banks began to interpose, so that only glimpses could be caught of anybody moving between them.

Then feeling a sudden impulse of rebellion against the spell which kept him staring blankly after the figures as they receded, he turned to look in the opposite direction, and thereupon began to utter an exclamation, which broke off strangled as if a hand had clutched him by the throat. For close by Hannah Wade was standing—Hannah herself—so near to him that he could have touched her—and yet at that very moment there was that same—that other—dark head appearing ever and anon above the silvery banks of the boreen. His world spun round for a minute, and then stood still again with a jerk.

Hannah and Francis looked at one another without a word. How long she had been there, and whence she had come, he did not know, but her eyes, dark with fear, told him that she knew what he had seen. The silence seemed to have lasted a long while before it was broken—by neither of them. A voice came from seaward, shouting in the sustained roar which mariners learn to oppose to the

Digitized by Google

howling-down of winds and waves. "Hi then, Hannah, girl," it said, "Is it stoppin' there you'd be till every sup of the say's dhrained out on us to beyant the King Pharaoh's Islands? Come along wid you out of that, before we have th' ould boat crawlin' in the black mud like a man-keeper in a ditch-bottom.

"That's ould Micky Devlin rowed me over," said Hannah, with a hoarse endeavour to speak naturally. "I mustn't be keepin' him any longer." She waited a moment, as if hoping for something, and then turned away alone; but Francis did follow her a few steps behind. To do so seemed to him more possible than to make his solitary way home through the sand-hills amongst which those two forms had disappeared.

Old Micky smoking in his boat was a homely and reassuring sight. He greeted their joint appearance with laughter loud and long, and much jocular comment. What they responded to it they never knew, and neither did he; but his deafness was complaisant in its conjectures, and he subsided into chuckles of unabated satisfaction. On embarking Francis asked eagerly to be allowed to row, but the old

Digitized by Google

man thrust him back sportively with the butt-end of an oar, and said: "Och no, boyo; sure I wouldn't be separatin' yous be any manner of manes. Sit you down beside her, and lave th' ould paddles to meself that's got nothin' better to mind." Francis, however, took a seat as far aloof from his fellow-passenger as the limits of the stern-benches would allow.

As they slid out into the soft mother-o-pearly water, Hannah felt unspeakably forlorn. It seemed to her that all her hopes were slipping away from her along with the strand she was leaving, and that her landing on the other side would be to find a world grown desolate for evermore. The feeling strengthened with the dwindling distance, while old Micky pulled and poked his unappreciated fun, and Francis sat silent and did not look at her. The good luck but now so safely in her keeping, had turned into a thing wild and winged, that hovered on the point of taking flight. Within a few fleeting minutes, if ever, she must grasp and re-capture it; and yet the attempt failing would scare it from her irretrievably. Thus it came to pass that, although her better judgment admonished her that she was acting over-

Digitized by Google

hastily and at an ill time, she could not forbear any longer, but moving down the bench till she sat opposite to her sweetheart, she held out to him what she had all this while been hiding under her shawl — something that glistened in the sun—much as the knife-blade had glittered.

"It was me poor father's watch," she said, "I went over of a purpose to fetch it back for you. It's as good and better than the one you're after losin', Francey, and you're kindly welcome to it. There it is—you'd a right to be puttin' it on before we're landin'. The chain's rael silver—look, Francey."

But, alas! he shrank away from her proffered gift as if it had been a scaly serpent, and said hurriedly, with hardly veiled repugnance: "Ah no, Hannah, I wouldn't be takin' it off you—I've no use for e'er such a thing—keep it yourself."

She withdrew her hand with a sinking heart, but she only half obeyed him. For she suddenly turned from him and dropped watch and chain with their golden gleams and silver overboard into the sea. Neither she nor Francis felt that there was anything reckless or strange in the action. The old man did not observe it.

Digitized by Google

But albeit sadly cast down by this repulse, Hannah would not yet face despair. She still clung passionately to the hope that her sweetheart was not going to fail her at this sore pinch, and leave her wandering forsaken in a world haunted with mysterious horrors, new and old. So presently she leaned forward to pluck him by the sleeve, and began speaking again in an eager undertone: "Francey—Francey—I never touched him—before God I never did—nor she either. He run agin it himself. I'll tell you the way it was. You see, that evenin' after I come back from me aunt, I was gettin' a look at me poor father's watch that me mother kep' for me, and so be chance she had it in her hand when that awful man—Miles Roche—he come bawlin' home wid dhrink taken, and when he seen a sight of the watch he let a roar, and was for grabbin' a hould of it and wranchin' it away from her. So to scare him off of her, I caught up the big knife was lyin' on the table, where we had it slicin' the bacon for the supper—and wid that he come runnin' at me, and reeled up agin it—I never touched him. But down he dropped, and ne'er a word out of him after that. It was no doin' of ours, God knows this

Digitized by Google

minute—but we couldn't tell what the people 'ud be sayin' to it—we got that afeard, and we thought maybe—But sure you seen—you seen what we done wid it—there in Larry's Horsepond—Francey, man, it's the truth I'm tellin' you."

"Ah, to be sure it is, Hannah, jewel," said Francis, soothingly. Her heart leaped up at the kind word, but when she looked into his face for ratification of it, she saw that he was merely *frightened*—which was a very great disappointment.

Just then old Micky, who had been looking over his shoulder as he rowed, said: "There's a quare clanjamfry of people waiting on the shore, beckonin' to us as if we was a ferry-boat, and they after bein' left behind. What would they be wantin' wid us at all."

A knot of the neighbours were, as he said, gathered on the shore, evidently to meet the boat, and as they came within earshot, Hannah heard her name called with rueful ejaculations. She had scarcely set foot on the shingle when Mrs Maguire seized hold of her. "Och, Hannah, girl dear, what took you out of it this mislucky day? And we sendin' after you, high ways and low ways, and thinkin' you was

Digitized by Google

up at Cochranes, but not a bit of you could we find—and now your poor mother's died on you, the crathur—may the Lord have mercy on her sowl."

"Why—what ailed her?" Hannah said dully.

"Sure the sorra a one of us knows till the doctor comes. But not so long ago I called in at your house to borry a pint-mug, and there she was lyin' asleep on the bed, and lookin' none too well, I thought, nor wake her I couldn't. So I bid Mrs Tuohy come in and see her, and she was of the opinion the crathur was as bad as could be, and we ought to be gettin' his Reverence to her and Dr Hamilton. And the two of us stopped wid her while the lads was runnin' wid the messages; but there was never a sign of her wakin'. Dhramin' somethin' she was, that's sure, for whiles she'd be moanin' and sayin': 'She's goin' to desthroy us—desthroyin' us she'll be'—and other whiles she'd keep on sayin': 'We'll never do it, Hannah, we'll never do it.' But after a bit she got aisy and quite, and then, before we rightly knew anythin', she was gone—och, the crathur, God be good to her. Sure it was the Lord's will, Hannah, and nobody could ha' tould it 'ud happen."

The neighbours thought it natural enough

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

that Hannah should run off home "in a great distraction entirely." But they were surprised to see that Francis Conroy did not accompany her, and made no offers of consolation or assistance. However, greater marvels awaited them. For Hannah's conduct that night was extraordinary indeed. Not a soul would she have to sit up with her, or let inside the door. And on the morrow she was no longer there. She must have slipped away during the brief darkness of the summer night, and nobody at Clonalty ever heard of her again. Of course the affair became warp and woof for a web of strange stories, some of them so uncanny that when, after much delay, the Wades' household effects were auctioned off for the benefit of Hannah's old aunt, who eventually claimed them, many of the neighbours averred that they would be long sorry to have anything coming out of that house inside theirs.

All this happened many years back, and Francis Conroy, who probably knew more than anybody else, and yet not a great deal, about the matter, went off soon afterwards to the States, without having given any full account of his experiences on that sunny summer afternoon among the sand-hills at the Wades' old home.

Digitized by Google

But he may have let a word fall here and there, and rumours, all the more portentous for their vagueness, got about. To this day they hover darkly round the lonely sand-pit; and in all Clonalty—which numbers, perhaps, not much less than three score of souls—you would not, I believe, find a man or woman, hardly even a child, who would venture to linger towards dusk anywhere within sight of Larry's Horse-pond.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

To Dick O'Neill, sauntering about his neglected gardens, came a message that "the sergint from the pólis was above at the house, and would be obligated if he might throuble his Honour for a minute," a summons which he reluctantly obeyed, apprehensive of hated magisterial business. During his short residence at Portrosna Castle, two or three experiences of it had befallen him, and on these occasions he had shown a strong tendency to pay everybody's fines himself, and to apologise impartially all round, which could not but speedily establish his reputation as the most popular J.P. on the commission. In fact, the local constabulary had already agreed among themselves that young Mr O'Neill was too easy-going altogether, and they'd do better in future to bring cases before Captain Marsh, or Mr Digby-Johnstone at Crossmaclone, who'd a righter notion how to deal with them lads. Sergeant McEvoy at the same time expressed some wonder that "a

Digitized by Google

gentleman who, it was understood, had travelled as much abroad as any regiment on foreign service, shouldn't have got more world-learning like than to be took aback by every slieveen might come blathering at him." This morning, however, they had departed from their rule, under stress of an urgent case and the absence or illness of the more competent authorities; so that when Mr O'Neill entered the library, he saw his forebodings fully justified. For the room seemed to be crammed with people from the village, though in reality the throng was thickened by the fact that all the domestic staff were lighting the fire ostentatiously, in their anxiety to witness the official investigation of a crime which had scandalised Portrosna.

It was nothing less enormous than that one Mattie M'Niffe, an elderly woman of doubtful character, had been caught almost in the act of purloining an article from the wash which Mrs Duffy had put out to bleach in "the little grass slip alongside of the road forenint the Widdy Quinn's." Almost, but unluckily not quite. For though Mattie had been seen to scramble through a gap in the dyke at the one end of the field, and to "lep like an ould froghopper on wires" down the bank at the other, just before

Digitized by Google

Mrs Duffy came out and noticed the theft, no testimony was producible with respect to Mattie's proceedings exactly in the corner where the clothes were sunning themselves. And the stolen shirt, which was picked up immediately afterwards on the roadside, had been artfully dropped close to Mad Bell, as she sat under the lee of the bank, "sortin' through the bits of things she had in her ould basket, the crathur." This attempt to shift suspicion was in Portrosna's eyes the blackest feature of the affair.

"I wouldn't have thought so bad of it, your Honour," said Mrs Brennan, "if she hadn't done her best to be puttin' the discredit on Mad Bell, the poor little ould respectable diminted body, that niver laid a finger on a pin's point didn't belong to her in all the years she's comin' and goin' among us."

"And who's offerin' to pass a remark agin Mad Bell at all, at all? It's great ould talk the woman has," said Mrs Autolycus, with half-abashed defiance. She was a small shrivelled person, wearing the expression of a magpie; and she now looked on wistfully, as that bird might have eyed a rescued fork, while Mrs Duffy, the washer-woman, spread out the recovered shirt over an Atlas and a Greek lexicon,

Digitized by Google

upon the library table, bewailing with an artist's chagrin the destruction of her handiwork.

"Och to goodness — sure I wouldn't ha' minded on'y nothin' 'ud suit her but one out of the finest set of all your Honour owns. And the ilegant colour 'twas blachin'; the foam of the say was yalla to it—and to go wisp it up like an ould dish-clout and sling it in the puddles—och, look at it, all crases and mud. The loveliest bowl of could-water starch I was after mixin' for the front of it, wid a lump o' sugar in it to smoothen it, and left it to thicken on the windy ledge, while I'd step out to fetch me things in—and there if this one wasn't gone off of the grass before me eyes! But, bedad, I well knew where it had travelled, as soon as iver I beheld yon little-good-for leggin' away down the road; and I let a yell to me son Tim there, that was spreadin' top-dressin' in the meadow, to be stoppin' her. Troth, when she heard that she took off wid herself for her life, till be luck she run full tilt into constable Molloy comin' round the corner. So here we'd have her grabbed as nate as an ould mackerel in a creel, if she's as slithery itself as a one of them, except 'twas for the

Digitized by Google

contrariness of Widdy Quinn, that's set her mind agin spakin' a word—she that seen it took and nobody else. For Katty Mahon noticed Mattie slinkin' through the gap—and more betoken if the girl had a grain of wit, she'd ha' tould me, and I'd ha' kep' me eye on the things—and Tim can swear he seen her tumblin' down the bank, wouldn't you avic?"

"Ay would I," averred Tim, "agin forty."

"Musha then it's yourself's the great man whativer, Tim Duffy; fit to swear the hind leg off of a dog any day," remarked Mattie, with sarcastic effrontery.

"And if he would, there's plenty besides him would be ready enough to swear agin any M'Niffe that iver walked," retorted Mrs Duffy, "for sorra a one of the lot of them you could trust the len'th of your little finger. Och, bejabers, niver a mother's son of them yet but was as full of villainy as he could stick together. Wasn't there her brother up at Cloughdrum went be the name of Look-out M'Niffe, because the people would be biddin' one another look out they weren't robbed, wheniver they seen the ould miscreant slingein' their way? Ah, sure, and didn't O'Farrell below say he'd liefer

Digitized by Google

see his haggard black wid rats than have one of them thievin' permiscuous about his place?"

"He said right, ma'am. And the trick herself played me the time I was stookawn enough to loan her me——"

Here the sound of a shrill voice came in a waft, as if through a door opened at some distance. It seemed to be alternately using strong language, and breaking into skirls of song.

"That's poor Mad Bell herself," said some one explanatorily. "Constable Long's keepin' her pacified at the hall-door, the crathur. She's waitin' to take Mrs M'Niffe's life when she comes out; she said she'd knock saucepans out of her for thryin' to do her that bad turn; ay did she, and small blame to her. Begorrah, if Mad Bell was as big as she's little, it's long sorry I'd be to get contendin' wid her; for she's a terrible wicked woman sometimes, when she's set a-goin'; and bad cess to them that sets her, the misfortnit bein'."

"I call it rael outrageous and scandeelious of Widdy Quinn to be that unmannerly about comin' up along wid us," protested Mrs Duffy, "and lettin' on be this and be that she niver

Digitized by Google

seen a sight, as if Mattie there was aught to her. And me that's obliged her many a time, so I have. And she knowin' right well 'tis on'y the shed-wall and the end of the stack hindered me of seein' the ould rogue at her thievin' wid me own eyes, so as I might be swearin' informations meself, and no thanks to anybody. But sure maybe his Honour might conthrive to make her spake out conformable, and tell the truth what she seen. And it his Honour's own grand shirt that was widin an ames ace of goin' to loss."

His Honour, even thus incited, recoiled from the task of reducing the Widdy Quinn to conformity, and suggested that she possibly had seen nothing after all.

"Och, musha, divil a fear of that! Sure how would she help seein', if she'd her eyes shut, wid her open door star-gazin' right into the bit of green? And, faix, there's divil a much goin' the road that the Widdy Quinn doesn't see if she so plases. Saints above, if a little ould weevil went aisy be her door on its stockin' feet, it's lookin' out she'd be to spy what was passin'. Ay, she seen right enough; but the fact of the matter is, it's quare and set-

Digitized by Google

up she's been iver since the notice the Quality took of her what little while they were here; them that your honour put out of it, or I'd a right to say your Honour's father—Heaven be his bed—a couple o' year back, and a good job too, for th' ould Gineral was an ugly-tempered man. Often we would be sayin' Miss Una was to be pitied wid him, for nobody had a word agin her, the quite, soft-spoken young lady. Howsome'er, she'd a great opinion entirely of the Widdy Quinn; times and agin she'd be down to her wid sugar and tay. And now since they're quit, what wid lavin' her the mindin' of her baste, and writin' her letters continyal——"

"Miss Ellis writes?"

"Bedad, yis, your Honour, as reg'lar as the month comes round. And unless it's that has cocked the Widdy up wid the idea she's a great one, I dunno what else the rason is. But, anyway, I'd have her to know she's no call to be disobligin' dacint neighbours, and colloguin' wid thieves and vagabones."

Mrs M'Niffe ducked an ironical curtsey, and said: "Thank 'ee kindly, ma'am."

"And wid them that has the imperence of a throop of horse-dragoons," went on Mrs Duffy,

Digitized by Google

modulating abruptly into a key of shriller exasperation, " and that knows better than any one could be tellin' them what went wid the patchwork quilt me sisther-in-law was at the loss of last Easter; and that this day owns a top-knotty hen belongs to them be rights as much as the crows in the sky."

When evidence of this very discursive nature is gone into thoroughly, proceedings take their time. A long time it seemed to Mr O'Neill before he was able to arrive, by devious ways, at the regretful conclusion that, considering the vexatious flaw in the evidence caused by the Widdy Quinn's contrariness, and the complications which might arise from Mad Bell's entanglement in the affair, the charge against Mattie M'Niffe must be dismissed. Whereupon the party dispersed, Mattie, perkily triumphant, being smuggled out by back ways, to frustrate Mad Bell's purpose of " doin' murther on " her wily defamer, a sequel which duty rather than inclination urged their neighbours to forbid.

Dick was thus at liberty again, but he reverted to his sauntering with a shadow on his mood. His visitor's references to " the Quality who had been put out of it " had jarred a memory aching-ripe ever since, on his return

Digitized by Google

from a long tour two or three years ago, he had found his family enmeshed in a lawsuit with their kinsman, General Ellis, then provisionally in possession of Portrosna Castle, but presently to be ousted by judicial decree. For sundry reasons Dick had much deplored this augmentation of his patrimony, but his disregarded protests could not turn the law from its course, which ran remorselessly as the share of a steam-plough through growths of ancient amity and intimacy, leaving the furrow behind it of a family feud, that any regrets of his seemed powerless to efface. His father's death, a year back, had not appreciably altered the situation, which Dick now found so unsatisfactory a theme for reflections that he determined to shake off his depressing thoughts by taking a walk through the village.

The February afternoon was flighty and tricky, prone to lay booby-traps with sudden down-pelting showers for any wayfarer who walked without regard to the disposition of the swiftly shifting cloud-masses over his head. Dick did so, and had just passed along the main street, when all the lights twinkling in the rippled puddles went out abruptly beneath a sliding black shadow, which straightway hissed

Digitized by Google

and hummed with drops blown aslant. Now, Dick O'Neill was so constituted that from no ordinary convulsion of nature would he seek refuge voluntarily in a stranger dwelling, be it high or low. But on this occasion the matter was taken out of his hands; for the same gust that brought the rain whisked his hat off his head, and wheeled it in at the door of the nearest cabin, whither he was fain to pursue.

"Ah, then! step inside, your Honour—step in out of the teems of rain," said the mistress of the house, Widdy Quinn, whose white apron gleamed in the dusky little entry where she stood, a dark-eyed woman, with an anxious expression and a comeliness wearing somewhat smoke-dried.

Dick would most likely have declined the invitation had he been in possession of his head-gear; but that was in the hands of the Widdy, who continued to wipe it vigorously with her apron's end, and to ask for it seemed rather more difficult than to step in. Therefore, following the line of least resistance, he stooped into the turf-scented room, where the corners were vaguely rounded off with blue haze, and the crockery on the dresser caught shimmering

Digitized by Google

flushes from the crumbling red hearth-glow, and a lank geranium stalk was dying in a jam-pot against the meagre pane.

"Arrah now, bad manners to you, wouldn't you be stirrin' to lave the gentleman a sate?" said Widdy Quinn, apparently to somebody sitting in the high-backed chair beside the fire; but she had to add joggles and pokes to her remonstrance before its occupant emerged.

To Dick's relief it was only an unusually large grey cat, which, descending with a sullen flop, stretched itself inordinately, and then went and ostentatiously sharpened its claws on the leg of the table.

"Sure, it's thinkin' to terrify us you are, bedad," said Widdy Quinn. "Sit you down, sir, and don't let on to notice. That's the thrick it has if iver I do aught to disoblige it: off it takes, and puts a polish on its ould croo-beens, as much as to say it's gettin' itself ready to reive all before it. Not that 'twould raise hand or foot agin anybody, the crathur, all the while. Sure you wouldn't, then, would you, ould Triptolemus?"

"Triptolemus?" repeated Dick, pricking up his ears. "Is that what you call him? Rather

Digitized by Google

a queer name for a cat; but I happen to know of another called so."

"Well, your Honour, 'twas the name Miss Una had for hers," said the Widdy, with obvious embarrassment.

"And is that her—Miss Ellis's—cat?"

"Well, your Honour, she left me the mindin' of him when she quit: she did so; that's the truth I'm tellin' you—and a quare name it was till you got used to it—Triptolemus—och, yis, that's what I said sure enough—unless 'twas somethin' diff'rint be mistake." The Widdy was growing more and more flurried and guilty in manner; to judge by it you might have taken poor Dick for a bullying counsel on the other side. So great, in fact, was her discomposure that, having finished wiping the mud off his hat, she went and hung it up on the corner of the dresser, instead of restoring it to him. But she turned round after this aimless action with a purpose suddenly full grown.

"Troth, sir, I'll tell you the whole of the matter," she said, "faix will I, for on me conscience I'll keep it blackenin' no longer. And be the same token it's maybe the nearest I can go to tellin' Miss Una herself, for Quality's in

Digitized by Google

a manner all the one thing; and many's the time she's sat in that same chair, when she'd be bringing me the sugar and tay. The more ould reprobate I to go chatin' her, and the crathur lyin' underground this two year——Och to goodness, no, sir, not Miss Una at all at all; she's well and hearty, glory be to God—but the mislucky ould cat. Be sittin' down agin, your Honour, for the rain's outrageous, and I'll tell you the way of it all.

"Sure she had the baste wid her when first she came to the Castle, and a hape she consídhered of him. They say some one had brought him home to her from the inds of the earth: an Angory they called him I believe, but for aught I could see he was just the very moral of me own Minnie that's sittin' over there, may goodness forgive me, lookin' as bitter as sut for bein' put out of the chair. A thrifle longer-haired he might be, and had a sort of fulness on him round the neck, but nothin' much to notice, and a quare notion he had that he wouldn't dhrink his milk could, except 'twas warmed up wid a sup of hot wather through it; and he might have a few more fantigues I disremember. Howsome'er I'm tould th' ould Gineral niver could abide the thoughts of the

Digitized by Google

baste, whativer the rason might be" (Dick believed he could surmise), "and if he met wid it comin' along the passages, he'd jump and clap his hands, and let yells at it, till he had it skytin' about distracted like a rabbit that's lost its houle. And Mick Denny, that helped the footman, says that a couple of days afore they quit, the Master says at dinner: 'And, mind you, *that brute's* not comin' along wid us,' sez he. 'And what will I do wid him then at all?' sez Miss Una. 'Och, sling it in the pond, or wheriver else you plase,' sez he, 'but wid a blessin' we'll be shut of it anyway.'

"So the next day Miss Una come here, wid the two eyes of her cried out of her head, the crathur, to ax me would I take and keep the bastie for her, and a couple of shillins a week I'd be ped for it. And I tould her I would and welcome, and nary the shillins I'd look after, for proud I'd be to have him for company to me and Minnie; and sorra a lie was in it, for I would so. But she said 'twould be a sort of pleasure to her to pay for his board and lodgin', and she'd send it every month, and then I'd a right to scrawm her a line to say what way he was. So she let the baste out of the covered

Digitized by Google

basket, and down she knelt on the floor to unbuckle a grand red leather collar he had on him wid little silver conthrivances shinin' all over it ilegant. 'Sure you're doin' right, Miss Una jewel,' sez I to her, 'to not be lavin' that fine little affair on him here, where the smoke and dirt 'ud on'y ruinate it. 'Tis too good entirely for us,' sez I.

"'Deed then, Mrs Quinn,' sez she, 'niver a bit too good it is at all, but 'twas an ould friend gave it to me,' sez she, and she turnin' as pink as me spark of geranium-blossom there, the crathur, thinkin' she'd done somethin' uncivil like, 'a *very* ould friend,' sez she, 'and that's why I'd liefer keep it. But I'll send you down some bright ribbons for collars,' sez she, 'to-morra.' And sure enough she remembered to send down some len'ths of the beautifullest-coloured ribbons I ever witnessed, unless it might be in a rainbow. Bedad, sir, there's the butt end of a one archin' itself agin the door, so the shower's apt to be clearin'. But it's little she thought, or I either, that they'd be in a manner the death of the poor thing the way it happint.

"For it might be a week after they'd quit, a letter come for me from Miss Una wid an order

Digitized by Google

to pay for Triptolemus a month beforehand; ten shillins it was, that came as near as anythin' to fluttherin' up the chimney on me, and I openin' the cover in me flurry at the fire. And somehow the notion took me that the least I could do was to put a new collar on him, so I cut him a piece of the green ribbon, and tied it on him in the grandest big bow. Saints alive, but the baste was sot up and consaited over it! He wouldn't look the way one of us was, but out of the house he trapesed, to show himself off belike. You'd mind the figure of him yit, if you'd seen him stompin' slow across the street there, wid his tail like a church steeple, and liftin' up his ould feet as if he was steppin' over hot pitaties. But presently I heard *wurra-wurra-wurra-woof-oof* settin' up outside, that would be Barney Keogh's rough terrier dog, the greatest little divil after huntin' cats; howane'er I niver thought to mind, because I well knew that any cat wid four legs to it had nothin' to do but skyte handy up th' ould thorn-bush, and defy the nation. But when the *wurra-wurrain'* seemed goin' on onnatural, out I run—and och, murdher alive, if the poor unlucky baste hadn't slipped a crooky thorn-twig under his collar, that was a thrifle loose on him, and there he

Digitized by Google

stuck caught fast, till the little rogue of a dog had got a woeful grip of him be the scruff of the neck, and was after givin' him a shake that shook the life clane out of him. Kilt dead he was afore iver I could part them. Och now, your Honour, that was a rael unchancy thing to go happen a body; and the whole botheration of it came sloppin' through me mind, like spilt wather when it's widenin' itself over the floor. For directly I got considherin' how I'd have to be writin' to tell Miss Una desthruction was done on her baste, and how she'd be frettin' after him, and belike thinkin' I'd took no heed to him; and how I'd a right to be sendin' back the ten-shillin' order, and ne'er another one comin', and I countin' on it towards Ray's bill, and the pitaties middlin', and pigs goin' low——

"And then somehow the divilmint come all of a suddint into me head, and the first thing I knew I'd whipped the green ribbon off of poor ould Triptolemus, and clapped it on to Minnie there, and I'd got the fire-shovel to scrape out a buryin'-hole under the hedge, and all the while I was sayin' to meself, same as if I was at me beads, 'It's Minnie's kilt—it's Minnie's kilt—it's Minnie's kilt,' and ivery sowl that come along

Digitized by Google

the road I'd let a bawl to that Keogh's dog was after murdherin' me ould Minnie on me. Begorrah, if I bawled the same big lie once that day, I bawled it twinty times; but if I'd known rightly the tormint 'twould be to me, I'd niver ha' let it off me tongue. For ochone, your Honour, the way one thing grows out of another does be terrific. Sure the very next day I had to be gettin' Foxy Doran's lad to do a letter for me to poor Miss Una, tellin' her Triptolemus was keepin' finely, and I wondherin' to meself that the ink didn't dhry into sut in his pen wid the inventions I was biddin' him write—and thankin' her kindly for the order I was as good as stealin' off of her. So now your Honour can persaive the rason why I couldn't be spakin' agin poor Mattie M'Niffe this mornin', no matter what I may ha' seen her doin'. How'd I have the face, and I thievin' away reg'lar this two year, and she on'y pickin' up an odd thrifle now and agin? Mrs Duffy did be castin' it up to me that I was colloguin' wid the likes of such a notorious ould good-for-nought; and thinks I to meself, 'Sure if I do so, sorra the hap'orth better I am, or worse, if there's any differ between us.' It's heart-scalded I am," quoth Widdy Quinn, so piteously that Dick plunged

Digitized by Google

hurriedly into an attempt to set matters in a pleasanter light.

"Oh, of course you were reluctant to vex Miss Una with the bad news; nobody could blame you for that."

"Nary the use there's in that," said the Widdy, disconsolately. "Thried it I have often, but the more I'd let on 'twas Miss Una's frettin' I did be mindin', the more sartin-sure I'd get that niver a thraneen I cared about her frettin', or anythin' else except the shillins. And the same way I kep' on thinkin' to persuade meself 'twas Minnie got kilt after all—niver a bit of me could. D'ye see the white forepaw she has on her, your Honour? That's the most of the differ there was between her and Triptolemus; and it seemed to me whenever I'd get anywhere's near mixin' the two of them up in me mind, out she'd cock her ould fut, same as if she was callin' me a liar to me face. I got to hate the sight of it. Or she'd come and rub her head agin' me, and I talkin' to any of the neighbours, till they'd be passin' the remark that the baste was grown as friendly wid me as if I'd had it as long as me own poor Minnie; and then, goodness forgive me, I'd wish she was choked. Ay, often enough I do

Digitized by Google

be wishin' she'd just die away wid herself, and lave me a chanst to quit the sin off of me conscience, for all she's been the greatest company to me these ten year. Sure of an evenin' when she'll be rowled up forenint me in the chair, blinkin' her two eyes at me, and carryin' on like an ould cushion wid a creak in it, I do whiles git past me patience, and 'Bad luck to you then,' I'll say, 'sittin' cocked up there in contintment, purrin' and purrin', and damnin' me sowl.' 'Twas on'y th' other night the notion came into me head I'd ax Constable Long for the loan of a bit of the quare poison stuff they got at the barracks for slaughtherin' the rats. Stiffened them up it did, I heard tell, like so many ould shoes. For if once I'd Minnie stiffened, there'd be an end of writin' lies and thievin' ten-shillinses for good and all. But, och, I hadn't the heart to go do such a thing, and that's a fac'. Morebetoken, wheniver I take any account consideherate of the crool idees I'm gettin' to have in me mind, it's terrified in a way I do be, for sez I to meself: 'What sort of ould divil am I comin' to at all? It's apt I am to be doin' murdher on some unlucky bosthoon of a human crathur, let alone an innicent

Digitized by Google

brute-baste, afore I rightly know what I'm at.

"Many's the time I've had it on the furthest end of me tongue to be tellin' the whole consarn to his Riverence at confession. But then I know right well the first thing he'd bid me would be to lave off the lyin' and desaivin', and stop them orders a-comin'; and whatever he'd say I couldn't go agin for me life; so tellin' him would be all the same thing as openin' a door you couldn't shut to: and niver a word I've let on. And himself not long since offerin' to give me a character to the new agint for an honest respectable tinant! Troth, if it's meself's not the deceptionable ould haythen, get me one. And dozens of times I'd me mind made up strong that anyhow niver a penny more comin' that road would I touch to be spendin' it. Keepin' it safe in me ould glass-lidded box I'd be, and perhaps sendin' it back cliver and clane, as I'd on'y a right, to Miss Una one of these days. But musha goodness help us, what wid this thing and the other, when the starvation does be in it—and the poor crathurs borryin' loans—and meself took bad now and agin—the end of it was the order 'd slip out

Digitized by Google

of the box agin afore I'd fairly clapped down the lid on top of it. And changed at the post office 'twould be, your Honour; and onst it was broke, sure you might as well thry to hould a crumbled clod of clay a horse is after settin' his fut on, in your hand, as think to be keepin' it. And the same way 'twill be wid the one come yisterday. A bit late it come, because of Miss Una bein' laid up this long while, she sez, wid a could—wondherin' she was, the crathur, whether Triptolemus remimbered her yit—and the ould Gineral took rael mortal bad on her now—and I to be chatin' her in the middle of her misfortins——"

"By Jove!" said Dick, diving suddenly out of his chair, which was so constructed that it could be quitted only by a vigorous header, "can you tell me where she is at present?—where she writes from?"

The mere aspect of the note which Widdy Quinn produced from her glass-lidded box made Dick feel vaguely as if he had received a bit of disquieting information. It was dated from a street in the town of Galway, and its few hurried lines were written palely upon a sheet of thin limp paper, such as might be used by some struggling retailer, fain to

Digitized by Google

minimise his trade expenses. "Look here, Mrs Quinn," he said, when he had read it through several times, "if you'll leave the matter to me, I think I could explain it to Miss Una,—she's my cousin, and I used to know her very well. It might, perhaps, be a mistake to tell her just now, when she's so uneasy about her father, since she seems to have thought a great deal of the beast—by Jove she does. I daresay I could get her another from the same fellow. But anyhow, I'll see what's best to be done."

"The blessin' of God be on your Honour, then," said the Widdy with fervour, "for the load 'twould take off of me ould conscience couldn't be tould in speech."

As she watched him splash down the glistering roadway with the note in his pocket, the anxious pucker into which an obliquely dazzling ray gathered her countenance, really belied a sense of relief such as follows the transference of some hopelessly bungled-over business to a person who you feel indefinitely confident will somehow make a good job of it for you. That sense would no doubt have strengthened in her, had she known how promptly and energetically Dick acted under his new responsi-

Digitized by Google

bility. As a matter-of-fact, he that evening posted a long letter to Galway, and followed to the same address at an early hour on the next morning.

About a fortnight afterwards, Mrs Duffy called on Mrs Quinn. The Widdy was glad of it, for the neighbours had all been more or less stiff with her since the affair of the stolen shirt. Hence the effusiveness of her welcome was such that Mrs Duffy's manners broke down so far as to ignore more than one "And what way's the childer?" and "What news do you be gettin' from Moyglish this long while back?" in her impatience to arrive at her own "Did you hear tell who's comin' home to the Castle?"

"Niver a tell I heard of comin' or goin', forby I know Mr O'Neill's took off wid him to Galway the week afore last."

"Sure Brian M'Clusky, that went wid him, come home this mornin', and brought word there's a match made between his Honour himself and Miss Una, and the weddin'-day fixed and all. Quite as quite 'tis to be, because th' ould Gineral's had a stroke, and is broke entirely to what he was. Brian would scarce ha' known him, he's that failed, on'y some

Digitized by Google

one let the door slam, and then 'twas all the 'blamed blunderin' brutes,' and 'confounded mischievous ijjits' wid him, just the same as iver. But two it takes to help him across the room."

"Well, now, that's a pity," said Widdy Quinn sympathetically; "and himself that was always a fine—" she cast about for an appropriate adjective — "a fine free-spoken gentleman."

"It's quare altogether he's got, Brian sez. Took up wid the idee, he has, that it's he owns the Castle and all, and the others do be humourin' him, and lettin' on 'tis the way he thinks. And he's comin' here to live when Miss Una's married, that's to be in next to no time. None too well, Brian sez, she looked. Sure, she'll ha' fretted about the Gineral. But Mr O'Neill was in great spirits whatever. Some message there was he called after Brian to be givin' you—that you were to be mindin' the cat till Miss Una 'd come for it—sure, he'll tell you himself. Belike she'll be takin' it back."

"Belike will she," said Mrs Quinn evasively.

But when she was alone, she stood for a while at her door in rueful contemplation

Digitized by Google

of the pseudo-Triptolemus, who sat enjoying the March sunshine under the writhen black boughs and crimped green buds of the thorn-bush.

"'Twill be a sort of judgment on me," she mused, "if Miss Una takes her away in the misbelief 'tis raelly himself; for 'tis lonesome I'd be widout the little ould crathur. But I scarce know whether I'd liefer she done that, or heard tell of the villainy I'm after conthrivin' on her. Sure, anyway, she'll be apt now to set less store be cats. To think of her takin' up wid his Honour here; but, bedad, I might ha' made a guess after seein' the caper he cut when he misconsthrued me to say somethin' had happint Miss Una. Troth, be the lep he gave in his chair, I thought a could dhrip off the roof must ha' caught him in the back of his neck. Och, but I'm the schemin' ould sinner! Howsome'er, sorra a penny of the last money of hers have I touched; and don't intind. But all the while I wouldn't wondher if that's on'y just because I'm after hearin' she's comin' back, and she so charitable to a body, I'm apt to not be so hard set. Bedad, now, there's no gittin' to the end of the divilment does be in one's mind; and it's

Digitized by Google

maybe no use thryin'. 'Tis the same way as when there's a sidiment of turf-mould at the bottom of your bucket of wather. If you keep stirrin' it up, 'twill bide ugly and black on you; but if you let it stand aisy and settle itself for a while, you'll be able to prisently pour it off as clane as you plase."

This piece of natural philosophy may have been suggested to the Widdy by a tin pan of water, which was flashing in the sun a few paces from her door. Just then a water-wagtail lit daintily on the rim, a most unsubstantial-looking "smal fowle," hardly worth the attention, one would have supposed, of any pot-hunter. Minnie, however, was of a different opinion, and uncoiled herself from her compact fur roll for a trailing crawl and a darting pounce, by which she gained nothing but two wet paws, as the wagtail took unscathed flight in airy undulations, with a derisive chirrup at every dip.

"Bad manners to you, Minnie," said the Widdy: "can't you let grabbin' after the little birds alone? Musha, good gracious! I'm thinkin' the two of us is scarce anythin' better than a pair of ould rapscallions. And,

Digitized by Google

bedad, we put our fut in it now and agin. But sure, if we niver done worse, we might be right enough yit."

A sentiment which, under the circumstances, leads us to infer that the fable rather than its moral was the Widdy Quinn's forte.

Digitized by Google

A PROVIDENT PERSON

MAC BARRY said that he wished he had a steam-yacht, a hunter, a rifle, and a pound; if he had those, he wouldn't want anything else. A pound was the largest sum that the financial experiences of nearly six years enabled him to imagine himself as owning, and he considered that it would be quite adequate to the maintenance of the rifle, the hunter, and the steam-yacht. His cousin Ethel, who was two years older, and inclined to be consequential, said that some people had *more* than a pound; she believed her papa had a hundred a year, and she hoped she would too, when she was grown up. Whereupon her sister Frances, Mac's contemporary, solemnly said: "But when we're growed up, perhaps we'll all be old beggar-men and beggar-women." A tramp, lately seen passing the window, had no doubt suggested the mention of this possibility, which was to Mac a new and startling idea.

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Digitized by Google

Ethel said confidently: "What nonsense; it's only poor people who are beggars, not people like us." But Frances replied, "Maybe they were like us when they were little; and then they growed and growed and growed into old beggars. I wonder if we will. It won't be very nice." Frances's grey eyes were so large and cloudily dark that they would have looked melancholy, even if she had been taking a cheerful view of things, which she seldom did. "I hope I won't be the sort that is lame, and has big bags," she said; "they're the nastiest of all."

These speculations were taking place towards the end of luncheon at Rathbawn Castle, where Mac Barry and his cousins, and their respective parents, were spending part of the summer on a visit to his grandfather, Lord Ballyduff. The subject was changed at this point by Frances's mother asking Mac whether he would like to drive with her that afternoon, when she went to see Mrs Fletcher at Manor Vaughan. He said, "The knees of me knickerbockers is too dirty to go anywhere in the carriage, thank God!"

"My dear Mac," said his Aunt Marjory, "you really should not use such expressions."

Digitized by Google

"*Well*," said Mac, "I'm sure I'm a great deal thankfuller for being too dirty to go visiting people, than for having me dinner—luncheon, I mean. I went with Lil sometimes, and they squawked like hens, and gave one bad little biscuits with caraway seeds in them, at tea. I didn't want anything, but they can't ever let a person alone, and I'd rather stay at home, thanks."

So Mac, having successfully resisted this distasteful entertainment, it was settled that the little girls should go, and he resumed his meditations upon the future and its possibilities. The particular one spoken of by Frances had taken rather a hold on his mind, being both novel and unpleasant. He had never formed any theory about the origin of old beggar men, and he now could think of no facts that struck him as satisfactorily inconsistent with their evolution out of a person like himself. Ethel's argument did not reassure him in the least, because he thought very poorly of her sense. Just at that moment she was teasing her mother to let her put on a new frock, which seemed to him exceedingly despicable folly. But he was not disposed to agree with Frances in accepting the possibility as an inevitable fate; he would

Digitized by Google

rather look upon it as a peril to be guarded against. And for this reason he thought he would, in the first place, consult any people upon whose judgment he at all relied, as to whether they believed it to be really impending. The number of these persons was small, the more so because his father and mother had both gone away for a few days; however, he presently found his Uncle Herbert writing in the library, and jogged his elbow as a preliminary to a conversation. This caused a blot on Colonel Barry's letter, and perhaps on the record of his language for the day, but Mac said with a sort of bland surprise, "By Jove, that's a big black one. But you must have had a great deal too much ink in your pen, you know. You needn't prod it down to the bottom of the bottle every time, as if you were fishing with it."

"Well, what do you want?" inquired the ungrateful recipient of this good advice.

"Look here," said Mac, "would you think that a person like me would be an old beggar-man when he growed quite up?"

Colonel Barry had just been looking over a highly unsatisfactory account, and what with that and the blot, felt pessimistic about things

Digitized by Google

in general. "Upon my word," he said, "as far as I can see, it's beginning to look as if we were all uncommonly likely to come to that one of these fine days. But run off, young man, for I'm busy."

"I should have thought," said Mac, moving towards the door, elaborately at his leisure, "that *you* were too old to grow into anything else ever. And I *am* going out, as it happens, to speak to young O'Sullivan."

Mac found young O'Sullivan, who was rather a crony of his, raking gravel not far from the house. It did not accord with his sense of the fitness of things to consult this friend point-blank about his own future prospects, and he therefore said, after a while, with a view to leading up: "Do you think, Dan, that you'll ever grow into an old beggar? I s'pose you'd rather not—a raggety old beggar-man, you know."

But young O'Sullivan replied curtly: "'Deed then, sir, I never heard tell of any of me name but was very dacint, respectable people. I dunno what talk you have about beggars." And collecting his rake, hoe, and brush into a bunch, he dumped them down across his wheelbarrow, and trundled it huffily into a shrubbery walk.

Digitized by Google

This source of information being thus prematurely stopped, Mac had begun to wonder why young O'Sullivan went off in such a hurry, when he saw coming along the avenue the same old man who had passed by the window at luncheon, and who since then had been visiting the regions of the kitchen. He seemed to be a very typical beggar-man, with a mysterious-looking leathern wallet, a long beard, and garments that flapped in large square tatters; and it struck Mac that here was a favourable opportunity for obtaining knowledge from the fountain-head. Consequently he said in reply to the new-comer's salutation: "I can't assist anybody, because I've left all my money upstairs in a drawer that locks. What used you to do before you began to walk about?" This appeared to him the most delicate way of describing the other's profession. "Hadn't you ever any money of your own? Or had you as much as a florin and a sixpence, and a silver mug belonging to you any time, only then you growed up different?"

Old Joe Gafney had never been endowed with great conversational gifts, and was not now capable of much beyond his professional litanies, but Mac's question chanced to touch

Digitized by Google

a theme upon which he still always waxed eloquent, and he said: "Is it money? Och, begor, sir, it's the grand little bagful I had saved up, that I kep' unbeknownst under the hearthstone at home, till one day me rogue of a wife she ups and robs me of it, and I away at Dunardmore Fair. On'y for her doin' that on me, the divil a fut 'ud I ever ha' took to thrampin' the road. Plenty I had saved. Ah now, sir, wasn't she the quare thief of the world to go rob me that way?"

The appeal somewhat embarrassed Mac, to whom it seemed unmannerly either to controvert or endorse this opinion of Mrs Old-Beggarman. As for the bag, it had never indeed existed save in Joe's imagination; but he believed quite as firmly in it as in the hot sun shining on his bewildered old head, and he maundered on volubly, until at last he abruptly broke off, and began to shuffle along with a whining request that a poor man might be relieved for the love of God.

"Oh, it's the grand-governor," said Mac, rather glad to see his grandfather approaching. Lord Ballyduff relieved all the parties concerned by means of a penny, and Mac joined him on his stroll. The prospect of growing

Digitized by Google

into an old beggar-man had somehow become gloomier in Mac's eyes during this interview, and now looked so ugly that he did not like to speak of it to anybody. He was meditating deeply upon plans of precaution—a hoard of savings might, apparently, be efficacious, if inaccessible to one's wife—and when Lord Ballyduff said: "What were you talking to that old fellow about?" he waved the question away with a preoccupied, "Oh, business—business, that you couldn't possibubly understand."

His grandfather was accustomed to such rebuffs, and they continued their walk without any more interruptions. They were going to the haggard, where a new rick was being built up in fragrant bundles under its shiny zinc hood. Outside the broad-leaved doors Lord Ballyduff threw away the end of his cigar, and carefully stamped out the red spark with his heel. "It wouldn't do to have a flare-up in there," he said.

"What would you do if you burnt it all up?" said Mac.

"Well, for one thing," said Lord Ballyduff, "the Insurance Company would have to pay me five hundred pounds."

"For burning up all that hay?" said Mac

Digitized by Google

with interest. "Then why on earth don't you? Would they pay all the same if it was me burnt it up? Yes, did you say? When you speak so indistinctually, you make a person quite deaf." It seemed to Mac that here was a very easy and enjoyable mode of securing a provision against an indigent old age, and the idea charmed him so much that his blue eyes gleamed in his small sun-browned face. "How many is five hundred?" he said.

"Oh—more than you'd know what to do with, at anyrate," said his grandfather.

"Wouldn't I just?" said Mac. "Well enough I'd know. I'd keep it in the same place with me cartridges. I should think one's wife would be afraid to go meddling with it then. When ladies and girls see a person looking at a gun or anything, they all say: '*Oh yawpy, yawpy—don't touch it—it's very dangerous*'—great idiots. But I declare there's Mrs Knox at the gate. If she's going to John Loughlin's, I'm going with her to see the new calf," and he ran off with his mind for the time being diverted from provident cares.

Mrs Knox, housekeeper at the Castle, was a sister of John Loughlin, who held a goodish little bit of land over towards Alanmore, and

Digitized by Google

had long been wondered at by neighbouring farmers for his persistence in keeping it under meadow year after year, till some of the fields, they said, were got that thick with moss, you might think he was after laying it down like a carpet at so much a yard. He had a right to plough them all up, and not have e'er a haycock sitting in a one of them for the next half dozen years. But John Loughlin continued to disregard their advice, and with the exception of a field or so of oats—which he was suspected of growing only for the sake of the thatching straw—had every rood of his holding waving with the long grass as sure as June came round. His haggard was a sight to be seen. It contained the accumulations of many a season, for grudgingly and of necessity did he consume or sell any part of his garnered crop. In the sheltered corner, against a screen of tall elms, rose up the long-ridged ricks "with wedge sublime," flanked by sharp-peaked pikes like gigantic peg-tops, all in capes of golden straw surmounting their soft umbers and greys. One small rick of very old clover hay which had been cut in smooth slices, looked as close and dark in grain as a brown loaf. To pace up and down

Digitized by Google

at the end of the paddock, whence he had a good view of their array, was his favourite recreation, and he indulged in it for some time on that brilliant July afternoon, while his sister and Mac were making their way towards him over the sunny fields. The view was even more than usually interesting to him just then, because the joy of building a new rick would so soon begin. All his meadows were down, and some of them up again in large cock, ready to be drawn in: the others were turning themselves into hay under the hot sunshine, with the least possible demand for labour. There would be, he calculated, barely room for one more big rick at the north-west angle of the walls. That would fill the haggard chock-full, not another ton would it hold. However, when Grace married Ned Lawlor—and the wedding might take place before next Shrove-tide—two ricks must go for her dowry, which would, alas, make some room. It said a very great deal for the sincerity of John's feelings towards his granddaughter that he could endure to anticipate such a woeful gap. He had for a long while past been reconciling himself to the prospect, and commonly wound up his self-conflict with

Digitized by Google

the reflection: "Ah well, sure it's the best thing I can do for the crathur, and that's one good comfort anyway. *She'll* be as plased and content as anything at all events."

Therefore the contrariness of things, and the differences in people's points of view, are clearly exemplified by the fact that all the while Grace was looking askance upon his beloved haggard, and could not bear the thoughts of Edward Lawlor. This Grace was the eldest child of his favourite daughter, who had been afflicted by matrimony with a struggling husband and a long family. To diminish those burdens he had some years before adopted Grace, and taken her to live at the farm, on the understanding that in due time her marriage portion should be provided. She found favour in his eyes, and it became rumoured in the parish that the portion would be, at least, "a very tidy little bit of money." So much so that Robert Lawlor, who was a warm man, when in quest of a suitable alliance for his son Ned, thought it worth while to consult John Loughlin on the subject. The result of the negotiations had been satisfactory, though not decisive. There was no need for hurry, as the little farm old Robert had

Digitized by Google

in his eye for Ned would not fall vacant yet a while, and the fortune of another not impossible daughter-in-law required cautious and deliberate investigation ere a final choice could be made. Neither was John unwilling, for his part, to indefinitely postpone the removal of his granddaughter and his two stately ricks. But that the affair was being talked of everybody knew, Grace herself among the rest, and she had unhappily taken a strong dislike to Ned Lawlor from the first moment that she beheld him sitting with the sun shining through his red whiskers in his pew near the pulpit at ten o'clock Mass. She now said to herself that she would never marry him, whatever anybody might do or say. Yet she was so used to seeing matches made up as a matter of course that she felt almost as if she were resolving vainly against a sort of fate which would overtake her whatever she might say or do. The project had not reached a stage at which her grandfather would mention it to her; and being a shy and silent girl, she had never expressed any sentiment that could give him a clue to the state of her mind. He never guessed at the steady growth of her abhorrence for Ned

Digitized by Google

Lawlor and everything connected with him, even the touch of his hand on the gate-latch, which she was wont to rub up with an old duster after he had gone through. But she knew right well that no such proposal would ever have troubled her had it not been for her bit of fortune, and she was also quite aware that this lay stored up among the tall ricks, and nowhere else. Often enough she had heard it said that every penny her grandfather was worth was in his hay. Consequently it was natural that she should look upon the haggard as a grievance and a bane. "Bad luck to them," she would say, "I wish the whole of them was burnt to dust and ashes out of that." (Grace may be excused, since there are few of us who have not at some time or other been ready to follow the example of the swineherd Ho-ti and his lubberly son.) And on days when she had happened to fall in with Ned Lawlor, it must be owned that she frequently added: "and himself in the middle of them."

This did occur on the morning of the day in question, when he stepped over to see about the loan of a hay-shaker, and had rather a long interview with her, at which he considered

Digitized by Google

himself to have behaved with an agreeable mingling of gallantry and facetiousness. He would have been much surprised, poor man, to learn that fright and detestation were the sentiments which he had inspired; but so it was. In fact, Grace's spirits did not soon recover from the dejection caused by his jokes, and when the shadows were beginning to lengthen she was glad to see the portly figure of her good-natured great-aunt Lizzie coming along under the hedge of Killenbeg's Corner. A little company might help her to shake off the odious recollection.

Mrs Knox and Mac had had a somewhat perplexing walk. Hitherto, Mac's experience of nature had been gathered exclusively at the sea-side. He had not yet quite unlearned the instinct to seek in the gravel for shells, and he still felt disappointed at its unproductiveness of any desirable varieties. Lanes and yards and fields abounded for him in extraordinary objects, concerning which his curiosity was only restrained by his constant wish to pose as one of those who know. But to-day his ignorance was complicated by a theory which he had based upon his grandfather's remark about the fire insurance. He had

Digitized by Google

understood the grand-governor—a mode of address adapted from his father's—to announce a reward of great magnitude offered for the destruction of hay in large quantities; whence he inferred that hay was esteemed a worthless substance, to be got rid of summarily like weeds and other rubbish. Now therefore, as they took their way through the scented meadows among the silvery-green swathes and encampments of peaked cocks, he puzzled Mrs Knox by suggestions which seemed to argue rash and destructive propensities in Master Mac, whom she had heretofore regarded as an unusually reasonable and peaceable child. "Why, it 'ud be a sinful pity to go do such a thing, Master Mac," she replied to a plan which he had propounded for clearing a newly-mown field by sweeping it all into the big horsepond at one end, "It 'ud be no good for man or baste, after soakin' that way in the water. But maybe the child's thinkin' of flax, that has to be steeped, sure enough. Is that it, honey? Ah, dear now, it's the quare botch you'd make of your hay crop if you gave it the same thratement as flax 'Deed and I remember the stink of it, when they would be steepin' it in the bog-

Digitized by Google

holes up at me poor father's place. But hay's another pair of shoes. I must tell John the notion you had. But sure it's the fine little farmer you'll be one of these days."

"It's very vulgar to *daffaw* at everything a person says," Mac observed with dignity, for Mrs Knox's remarks had been threaded on a creaking laugh. Among farming people, even a small lay blunder supplies matter for infinite jest. "I daresay it *is* better to burn it up," he said. They were just then passing a gap in the hedge, on the other side of which lay a newly-weeded turnip-field, and close by, a withered heap was crackling and sending up a blue-writhing column, through which the flames could hardly make a wraith-like glimmer against the strong sunshine. The white flakes of the ashes came fluttering across and sprinkled him, as two blissful small boys stirred up the fire with sticks. Mac would have liked to stand and look on, but Mrs Knox said: "Ah, come along out of the blindin' smoke, Master Mac dear, or we won't have time to get Gracie to wet us a cup of tay."

When they reached the farm, Mrs Knox was glad to sit down and wait for that refreshment in the cooler parlour, while Mac pre-

Digitized by Google

ferred to accompany Nellie Reilly, the ploughman's daughter, on her mission styeward with the pig's bucket. He did not, however, consider himself under her surveillance, and she being intent upon collecting eggs, and gossiping over the yard-wall with some friends returned from the hay-fields, made no attempt to exercise any. So he presently strayed down to the far end of the farm-yard, where he made a most important discovery. Sitting on the top of the broken door-post belonging to a ruined shed, he found a little green and yellow match-box. It had a portrait of Parnell on one side, and a political cartoon on the other, and it contained a single slender pink-headed match. Mac had so often been warned against meddling with matches, that to strike one seemed an exquisite pleasure. But just now his mind was occupied with more serious matters than mere present enjoyment. Close by was the open door of the haggard, and it immediately occurred to him that this gave him a grand opportunity for securing the splendid sum which his imperfect knowledge of the insurance system led him to look upon as the meed of the incendiary. Here was quite as much hay as up at the Castle, and here were

Digitized by Google

the means of setting it all in a magnificent blaze; and with five hundred pounds warily stowed away, safe from a Mrs Mac of predatory habits, he felt that the fear of the old beggar-man's fate need no longer trouble him. "For," he reasoned, "if a person had even as much as one pound, one wouldn't go about after people saying: 'Och, your Honour's glory, give a poor man a copper, and the blessin' of God be wid you.'" And thereupon, with his precious box in hand, he proceeded to the haggard.

Some loose bundles of hay scattered near where one of the largest ricks stood on its low platform of stones and logs, seemed to him a suitable starting-point for the conflagration. The striking of the match took place successfully, and the delightful fizz and splutter and sulphureous odour left nothing to be desired. But to the eye the result was decidedly disappointing. Even under the shadow of the big rick, the air was so full of light that the little artificial flame could make only a faint bluish quivering in it, hardly visible, and Mac at first thought with dismay, "It's gone and went out." When it touched the hay, however, matters improved. Small golden stars

Digitized by Google

began to kindle, and run twinkling along the fibres, and now and then a tiny red tongue flickered perceptibly through a puff of white smoke like a tuft of thistle-down. John Loughlin, sauntering in the paddock not many hundred yards distant, might well have been smitten with a foreboding of ill, but he continued to gaze complacently upon his treasury, recking naught of the destroyer, who at that moment was squatting in the midst of it, clad in a brown holland suit and a broad-brimmed straw hat several sizes too large.

And after all, Mac's triumph was but brief. For a while the fiery golden stars increased and multiplied, and hurried hither and thither like a raid of luminous ants. But soon they began to dwindle and diminish, vanishing with a blink as bubbles do, until at length their bright array had been reduced to a solitary spark, the progress of which he watched with the deepest concern. It ducked and dived in and out of sight among the soft grey-green tangle, alarming him by prolonged disappearances, and then gleaming forth again, after he had almost given it up for lost. But finally it sped and hid itself in the heart of a more intricate wisp, and thence he was never to see it re-emerge, though he

Digitized by Google

watched for it long and earnestly, as a cat watches the hole's mouth in at which an expeditious mouse has slid. At last he had sorrowfully to abandon the hope that it would ever come gliding and glimmering back. His grand design had failed, and for the moment he perhaps regretted the glorious blaze that had been frustrated more than the accession of wealth which should have therefrom accrued. As he trotted back into the yard he resolved to say nothing about the matches. Mac's experience of life had not been very great, yet it sufficed to teach him that success justifies the means, and throws a handsome cloak over sins which would have worn a far less reputable habit if things had turned out otherwise. If he had burned John Loughlin's ricks down to the ground, he would have proudly owned the deed, and would have expected to receive not only his five hundred pounds, but also many praises unqualified by any moral reflections upon the impropriety of meddling with matches. Whence it appears that, although his premises were not altogether founded upon fact, he reasoned from them correctly enough. As it was, he could only rejoin Nellie rather crestfallen, and soon afterwards he set out for home. His little

Digitized by Google

cousins had returned before him; Ethel out of humour at her relapse into private life and an old frock, and Frances preoccupied with her own affairs, so the evening closed dully.

Yet all the while, had he but been aware, the fire-seed he had sown was thriving to his heart's desire. At first, indeed, a dampness in the lock of hay had most gravely menaced it with extinction, but it survived this peril and kept its hold on existence with gradually strengthening grip, until about sunset a waft of breeze came ruffling lightly over the littered floor of the haggard, and at a critical moment fanned the spark into a delicate flame. As the dusk fell this grew from the dimness of a wild violet's petal to the vividness of a scarlet poppy—of a great glowing cactus-cup—and then flared into a many-leaved brilliance such as never yet endowed any blossom sprung from the black earth.

John Loughlin had slept only a short while when he awoke to the consciousness of a fierce red light streaming into his little bedroom, and fluttering against its white wall like the reflection of a flaming wing. His window looked over the yard to the haggard, but he hardly needed the sight to assure him, he knew so well what must have happened. The nightmare of many

Digitized by Google

a sleep had come true. Those awful pinions were indeed flapping and soaring around his ricks, with pale smoke rolling and rushing between, against the massed shadow of the trees and the smooth-vaulted dark of the moonless sky. From the first moment when the glare met his dazed eyes he felt that his fate was sealed, and the knot of onlookers who gathered about the doomed stacks were unanimously of the opinion that "wid the hould the fire had took on them, and the quare dryness of everythin', you'd as much chance of puttin' them out as of puttin' out the stars in the sky." There was some running about with bucketfuls from the failing pump, and some futile splashing of water, but everybody recognised the bootlessness of the attempt, and soon desisted from it.

The spacious night all around him was very dark and still as John Loughlin stood watching his ricks burn away. A belated corncrake far off across the fields creaked faintly, as if the wheels of time needed oiling, and a star looked down a long way, here and there; else the fire alone made sound and light. It roared and crackled as it leaped and soared, scaling the carefully heaped-up hay mounds; sometimes it dragged down from their sides, as if with a

Digitized by Google

giant hand, great masses that came slipping and flaring to the ground, and sometimes it plucked off flaming plumes and bore them up into the air. Some of these were caught on the overhanging boughs of the elms, where they hung like strange fruit, which shrivelled and blackened the fresh green leaves. The scattered litter of hay and straw underfoot burst every now and then into a blaze, so that the whole haggard seemed to be paved with a fiery sheet, presently smothered beneath a heavy rug of woolly smoke beaten back by some caprice of the breeze. All spectators had to keep on the dark side of the low surrounding wall; not even a dog ventured in, though rats could be heard flopping desperately off the rick-stands, and rustling as they fled. But shrill yelps at a prudent distance showed that the fugitives were not escaping unmolested, and green, blinking eyes peered out of ambushes whence many a productive pounce was made.

So hungrily swift was this fire, and found fare so much to its mind in the drought-parched stacks, that it had well-nigh made an end of consuming them before the prompt midsummer dawn came back, cold and grey as a lingering remnant of the sunset. It showed sundry shape-

Digitized by Google

less black heaps, which lay with white smoke straining up through them, and shook into spangles of crumbling gold if they were stirred. John Loughlin's ricks, in short, had resolved themselves into materials over which he could no longer exercise any owner's rights, and he was a ruined man. Not a penny of them was insured. He had obstinately refused to take this precaution, not because he grudged the expense, but from a superstitious prejudice against acting on the hypothesis of so intolerable a calamity. If his death had seemed as odious to him, he would never have made the will which was locked up in a drawer with his lease, and a few things that had belonged to his wife. But now that the dreadful event was an actually accomplished fact, he seemed to contemplate it with rather surprising equanimity. He made no comment when Tim Mahony, close beside him, said to Andy Farrell: "Bejabers, it's plenty of room we'll have there, and we drawin' in to-morra," and Andy replied: "To-morra? Faix then we'd be the fine fools to go about that job to-morra, or next day, and the place as thick wid red sparks lyin' as a hayloft wid seeds —wouldn't we, sir?" Only as he turned back through the cold dimness to his house—a meagre

Digitized by Google

little white-washed box, originally a barn, and hardly so big as his most sizeable rick had been —a cock hard by uttered a drowsy crow, whereupon he looked round at the men who were following him and said: "Some of yous wring th' ould screech-owl's neck." And they muttered among themselves: "Och, the poor man—to be sure he would be greatly knocked about."

It seemed, indeed, as if his granddaughter Grace were more crushed by the misfortune than he. After they had finished their dreary breakfast, she retreated into a dark corner of the kitchen, where she sat such a picture of despondency, that the old man, watching her, began vaguely to wish he could offer her any consolation. He recalled her long visit yesterday from Ned Lawlor, and it suggested to him how probably she was fretting over the lost prospect of that alliance. This notion somehow touched his pride, and set a spring of energy stirring through the dull lethargy in his mind. To himself he said: "Sure I might be conthrivin' as good a match for her one of these days yet;" and to Grace he observed encouragingly: "Well, it's a grand warm mornin' anyway." Grace only murmured something dolorously; and in a while he got up and went out of

Digitized by Google

doors. As he did so the first object he noticed was Daddy Yellowman set on a window-ledge in the sun. Daddy Yellowman was a very large canary-coloured delft jug, which had lived for a long time on the Loughlin's dresser, and had become quite an institution at hay making, when carried afield with the froth of porter at its lips. John Loughlin now took it up, and filled it, for conveyance to Long Leg, where he knew there were people working. By the act he seemed to turn and face the possibility of going on.

Not long afterwards, Grace, who for her part had recognised the necessity of putting on the potatoes for dinner, was startled as she made up the languishing summer fire by the entrance of Nellie Reilly, wearing an expression of very contagious alarm. She had run at full speed through two or three fields, and was much out of breath as she clutched Grace's arm and said, between frequent pants: "I'm just after meetin' himself — the poor master — up in Killenbeg Corner—widin a stone's throw of the pond. It's there he was goin' as sure as anythin'—och saints—and about dhrowndin' himself he might be as like as not, that's what I'm thinkin' —for the lads was sayin' he's clane ruinated

Digitized by Google

entirely—and indeed he was lookin' as black and as bitter as sut, and I passin' him by, the poor man, he was so. But mercy on us all, there's ten fut of wather standin' in the deep pool up under th' ould thorn-bushes—and the botthom all a mask of thick mud—if a body got in there you'd never see sight nor light of him agin."

The two girls stared dumbly at one another for a few moments, with a sort of horror reflecting itself to and fro between their faces, and growing on its way. Then Grace rushed out of the house, retaining the fire-shovel unawares, and Nellie followed at her heels. They raced on over the pale-green of the lately shorn meadows, catching their feet in scattered wisps of hay, and stooping their heads against the dazzle of the sunbeams. And as, cresting the slope in Kilbeggan corner, they came close upon the pond, the first thing they beheld was Daddy Yellowman shining very brightly set beside the edge. At sight of it Nellie gave a scream. "The Lord be good to us all," she said, "carryin' it he was; he's after throwin' himself in." But Grace flung herself down on the bank under the hedge, with her apron over her face and her fingers

Digitized by Google

in her ears, and rocked herself as if she would lull her remaining senses to sleep. Whereupon Nellie broke into a wailful lament. She had an unsuspected listener, whose emergence from behind a curve of the hedge struck her overawedly mute; and Grace heard a voice enquiring: "What's the matter with her?" It was no less than Lord Ballyduff, who had come across the fields upon the report of the disaster befallen his old acquaintance and tenant John Loughlin. Grace recognised the voice, but through too stormy a cloud of trouble to leave her any constraining respect for persons, not even for Quality in the shape of a lordship and a landlord. So she continued to rock and bemoan herself. "What'll I do at all at all? Och me heart's broke. Sure it's meself's the wickedest crathur this day in the width of Ireland that's as good as took and burnt up me poor grandfather's haggard on him, forby dhrownin' of him in the black pool. But sure if I'd ha' thought he'd go for to do that, I wouldn't ever ha' let the big rick get on fire, 'deed and I wouldn't, not if there was forty Ned Lawlors botherin' one in it. Dhrownded dead he is be this time, and it all along of

Digitized by Google

me burnin' his ricks, that dhruv him distracted."

But the voice that replied: "Musha good gracious, what talk have you, girl alive, about burnin' and dhrowndin'?" made her uncover her face, to confront a refutation of her despair. For her grandfather, safe and sound, stood beside Lord Ballyduff, with whom, indeed, he had merely been conversing just round the corner. He was eyeing Grace with some disapproval. It seemed to him all of a piece—a small piece of course—with his other misfortune that his granddaughter should be discovered by his lordship sitting keening under a hedge, bare-headed, holding an irrelevant sooty shovel in her lap, and accusing herself vehemently of disastrous crime. "What ails you, then, to be sittin' there makin' a show of yourself wid our ould shovel?" he said to her in a mortified undertone, "Faix, one might ha' thought you'd had enough of fires at home to contint you." An appeal to regard for appearances was, however, thrown away upon Grace, whom more tragical thoughts were engrossing wholly. "Glory be to goodness if you're not dhrownded," she said, "but sure it's no thanks

Digitized by Google

to me, after lettin' the whole place burn to black cinders. For there it was, when I run down to the haggard late last night after the supper, to see had e'er a one of the hins been layin' in it—somethin' I noticed shinin' alongside the big rick, and sure enough, the bit of ground was creepin' all over wid sparks and wee flames of fire, like as if somebody'd dropped a lightin' match among the hay. And first of all I was goin' to let a yell for the lads to come and put it out; but then I thought to meself 'twas a good chance to be gettin' shut of him, if I just let it alone. So I slunk in wid me, and never a word I said about it."

"And what the mischief at all made you go do that?" said her grandfather, feeling himself threatened with the disclosure of fresh afflictions.

"It was—it was Ned Lawlor," said Grace, beginning to stammer a little over her explanation. "You see I knew his father and you had talk of him and me. And in course it was on'y the bit of money they was after, you would be givin' wid me — and every penny of that in the ricks—and I can't abide the thoughts of Ned Lawlor—I hate the name of him."

Digitized by Google

"Then the divil's in it that you couldn't ha' said so," her grandfather said bitterly. "Sure if you'd tould me, never a word more talk would there ha' been about the matter. Sorra the match 'ill I make up for a girl agin her will, not if the other folk was offerin' to stock the counthry-side for her—troth no wouldn't I. There was me poor sister Maggie, her they gave to an ould feller up at Annalone, whether she would or no, and if they did, it's follyin' at her buryin' we were widin a twelvemonth of the weddin'. Sez I to meself that same day, it was neither art nor part I'd have in any such a thing in the len'th of me life, and I hadn't, nor I wouldn't. Your mother plased herself. But bedad now a lass is more conthrary to ha' doins or dalins wid than a dumb baste of the field, for sooner than spake a sensible word to you, she'll take and set house and home flarin' in a blaze about your ears."

Her grandfather's censure of her silence might not have been unanswerable, but Grace's mood was too remorseful to seek for justifying arguments, and she resumed her lamentations under her apron, saying, "Sure, I tould you I was the wickedest crathur ever walked. Deed,

Digitized by Google

I wish I was after dhrowndin' meself in th' ould pond there, and a better job it would ha' been." This could not be permitted, and the old man said soothingly, "Ah, whisht, then, whisht; that's no sort of talkin'. And sure now, maybe there's no such great harm done after all. Maybe it's foolin' meself I was, in a manner, thryin' to fill up me mind wid the thought of th' ould stacks. I'd do righter to be breakin' up the meadows, and gettin' in the crops—If I could conthrive it," he added, brought up short by the recollection that his ways and means had largely become dust and ashes.

"Here's your sister, Loughlin," said Lord Ballyduff, somewhat relieved by the diversion, as Mrs Knox appeared at the neighbouring gate. "And, by Jove, I believe there's that young scamp." For a small figure scudding along by the hedge developed itself into unmistakably Mac.

Mrs Knox arrived first. The business which had brought her hurrying through the noontide heat was so important that she did not hesitate to enter upon it even in the presence of his lordship. "Well, to be sure, John," she said to her brother, "you're the unlucky man. Howsome'er, it's unluckier you'd be this minute

Digitized by Google

if everybody else was as headstrong as yourself —Gracie, child, have you a mind to be ravin' wid a sunstroke, that you've run out wid ne'er a shadow of a shawl over your head? But as for your hay, John, that's clane destroyed and gone to loss if there was nobody, only you, mindin' it, that wouldn't put it under the insurance for man or mortal, it's right enough all the while, be raison of me payin' it into the Alliance office for you this last five year as regular as the clock. All the papers I have belongin' to it up at the Castle. Four hundred pounds they'll pay you on it, and if that doesn't cover it all, 'twill make a good offer at it any way."

"Troth and it's youself's the quare one," said John Loughlin.

"I always said that Mrs Knox was one of the most sensible women I knew, Loughlin," said Lord Ballyduff, "I believe the best thing I could do would be to appoint her my man of business. But you should come up to the Castle at once and look at these papers. Mac, you run up against one like a spent cannon-ball."

"Never mind," said Mac forbearingly, "I suppose you weren't looking."

"As far as I can judge, your lordship," said

Digitized by Google

Mrs Knox, highly gratified, "all we have to do is, send word of the fire to the Insurance Company, and they're bound to pay us the money, though whether to me brother or meself I can't precisely say. To him, I should suppose, but anyhow, it's all the one thing, for 'twas on his account I done it."

"It's a great lie," said Mac. "Look here, grand-governor, she's telling a *most awful* untruth." Although manners had indeed kept him from breaking in upon Mrs Knox's speech, excitement and impatience now made the tone of his interruption all the more unconventional. "She didn't burn them a bit, don't believe a word she says," he asseverated, "It was me lit them with a match, and I thought it had went out on me, but it mustn't have, after all. So it's *me* that they're to pay the four hundred pounds to, and not to anybody else. Why couldn't you stop and wait for a person? I've been running after you all the way to tell you that you'll have to write for the money to those people, because I don't exactually know where they live. But mind you say it wasn't she burnt them at all—it was me with a pink-headed match that I found in the yard. Young O'Sullivan told me they were all destroyed."

Digitized by Google

"This is a very shocking story of yours, Mac," said his grandfather, looking aghast, "and I hope to goodness that you're only romancing."

"Why, to be sure it is, your lordship," said Mrs Knox with conviction, "Sure, how at all would the innicent child get to do such a thing, and he never next or nigh the place till yesterday evening, when he came over wid me, and wasn't out of me sight, except only a few minutes that he ran out into the yard along wid Nellie Reilly there, and she'd take good care of him, or else I'd not have trusted ——"

"'Deed then, we were only just through the yard—never set fut in the haggard, bad or good; and where'd he get matches, ma'am? Sorra a one was there," Nellie protested loudly, recoiling scared by the sudden prospect of being drawn into the meshes of responsibility. "I never took me eyes off him the whole time," she averred.

"Oh didn't you, *my friend*," said Mac, with crushing emphasis, "had you them on me when you were talking to the people with pitchforks in the lane over the wall, that you said you wouldn't listen to gabbin' nonsense out of them? And I *was* in the hay-place,

Digitized by Google

and I *did* find some matches—it was only one match—in a little yellow box with pictures on it, that was near the calves' house. But it went off beautifully against the scrapey stuff on the side. And if you don't believe it, you may go and see where it is, for I put the box back there when I was coming in. Only there' nuffin in it now, except itself. Grand-governor, you'll have to write for my four hundred pounds."

Lord Ballyduff looked perplexed and uneasy, as Mac drummed impatiently on him to emphasise his injunction; but everybody else took, or professed to take, Mrs Knox's view of the matter, and she said, ah sure, it couldn't have been that way at all, for if Master Mac had had anything to say to it, it would have been in blazes of fire long and long before. A burning spark wasn't a sort of thing could go crawling about any length of time unbeknownst like a hayspider in a haycock. Their scepticism aggrieved and enraged Mac, as it threatened to filch from him the fruit of his successful enterprise; but his wrath seemed to avail nothing, and presently his grandfather said that they must be getting home, as it was nearly luncheon-time. The group accordingly

Digitized by Google

separated, John Loughlin with his sister and the girls returning towards the devastated farmstead, through the meadows, where he imagined, reluctantly enough, the cold gleam of the ploughshare shredding up their old green mantle. Mac and his grandfather went back to their somewhat out-at-elbows looking little ancient Castle, but they proceeded severally and silently, for Mac's resentment led him to stalk on ahead and decline entering into conversation. He was already sitting on the steps at the end of the terrace when Lord Ballyduff arrived just as the luncheon bell rang.

"Come along, Mac," said Lord Ballyduff.

But Mac replied without stirring: "If I do be an old beggar-man, I can tell you I'll never say 'Long life to your Honour,' and 'Heaven be your bed,' no matter *how* many pennies you give me."

The contemplation of this prospective revenge so far soothed his feelings that they permitted him to follow his grandfather into the dining-room. Yet, in the middle of his sago-pudding he remarked to his neighbour, Frances, with little apparent relevance, but much scathing sarcasm: "Some people are so

Digitized by Google

wonderful fine and clever that they can't believe anything a person tells them."

To which Frances, turning upon him wide and melancholy eyes, made answer: "Maybe some day you won't know any better, Mac, yourself."

And Mac said reflectively, looking towards his grandfather's end of the table: "I suppose they get all the sense used up that they had when they were rather youngish. Do you think your mamma's a hundred, Frances? A person must make 'lowances for them. But they may burn up their old ricks themselves next time. *I* intend to get my own living in another way."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A VERY LIGHT RAILWAY

THE newly-finished railway ran by Mrs Dowdall's front door with only the breadth of the narrow lane between. This was towards the middle of May, the construction having begun early in April, when the air first grew mild enough to make sitting out on the bank seem pleasant. An unusually long spell of fair weather had favoured the work in its progress, and hastened its completion; more than a month of innocent-looking daisy-and-speedwell skies had surveyed it, and no flaws of wind and rain had come to damage or delay. I am not sure whether it could be correctly called a Relief Work, but it undoubtedly did take the burden of many a leaden hour off Johnny Dowdall's mind. For, being so lame that the journey from one end of the lane to the other was quite beyond his powers, he rather often found himself hampered, when casting about for employment, by the meagreness of the resources within his range. All the eight years of his life had

Digitized by Google

been dominated by the fact that one of his legs was "quare," and tended constantly to become "quarer" still. Indeed, upon the last occasion when he and his mother had sought medical advice, the doctor talked of such desperate remedies that they had abruptly ceased to consult him, and for many days after, Johnny's master dread had been a vision of Dr Lawson's trap drawing up at their door. But since their removal out of the village row to the cabin lonesome among bye-lanes, this terror had faded from his thoughts, and did not molest him at his railway works. Over these he presided in every capacity, from chief engineer to delving navvy, and he, therefore, regarded the design and its execution with the fond delight which the artist can feel only for the poor thing that is all his own.

When finished, it was extremely complete, as far as it went, which, however, was not beyond two or three yards. The top of the grassy roadside bank had been laboriously hollowed out and levelled, and at one point even tunnelled through by means of a superannuated fire-shovel. Round willow twigs, deftly fitted together, made rails laid on broader sticks for sleepers, and other twigs set upright, peeled white,

Digitized by Google

blackened duly with soot, and connected with cotton threads, were telegraph posts, so realistic that you could almost hear the wind hum in the wires. Orderly piles of stones and cinders and timber flanked the line, where a junction was indicated by a maze of confluent metals traced in labyrinthine sidings. But his crowning achievement was perhaps the tall signal-post, whose arms of different coloured woods could be moved up and down. Johnny had wrestled long with a mechanism of crooked pins before he attained to this delightful result. If he prided himself more upon anything else, it was his rolling stock, which consisted of a truck and a carriage. They were both built of materials derived from the small paper-covered match-boxes, of which you can buy as many as six for one penny in the Dublin streets, or even seven—so I am told—if you craftily "let on" to walk away from the ragged urchin without coming to terms. In a happy hour Johnny chanced upon an accumulation of these boxes lying empty on the window-ledge, and he found that their garish yellow and green gave very effective touches of colour to his handiwork, especially after he had fashioned one strip into a flag, and had stuck poster-wise on the face of

Digitized by Google

a smooth stone the full-length portrait of a popular statesman, which adorned the lids. At a little distance it looked just like one of the soap or mustard advertisements which were inseparably associated with his idea of a railway.

This accuracy in details was due to his reminiscences of the time when he lived in the village—he called it the town—of Ballyhoy, and had been used to spend much of his leisure on the parapet of the bridge, whence he looked down into the little station, with its periodical flurries of arriving and departing and passing trains. A thunderous locomotive charging the arch at full speed, and enveloping him in a cloudy swirl of its wild white mane, was a strong sensation, which he relinquished with regret when they moved out of the village. That flitting had followed the death of Johnny's father, late head porter at Ballyhoy, and memories of the railway were accordingly fraught for Mrs Dowdall with the melancholy of good days done, so that her son's engineering operations rather distressed her when she first noticed them. Her shrinking from the subject yielded, however, to her conviction that "'twas a good job the crathur had somethin' to be divartin' its mind wid, and

Digitized by Google

she away in the fields the len'th of the day." So she had fluent praises forthcoming upon demand, and added with sincerity: "Sure now, Johnny avic, it 'ud be a great convanience to us of a Saturday, if it was a somethin' more commodious size." For now that two long miles intervened between her and Ballyhoy station, her weekly marketing became a serious item in the recurrent fatigues of her life. It was a terrible tag, she would remark disconsolately, as having replaced the deep-eaved lilac sun-bonnet in which she weeded turnips, or gathered stones, or planted cabbages all the week, by the small very old black straw reserved for town wear, she trudged away with her large battered basket. Sometimes when her wants were not of a bulky sort, her nearest neighbour spared her the tramp by doing her errands along with her own. This neighbour was a tall thin elderly woman, who occupied the cabin just out of sight round the turn. She lived quite alone, and as she had never been married, was spoken of unceremoniously as Maggie Ryan, a title to which the younger people were now beginning to prefix "ould."

There were no other dwellers in the lane and very few passers by, facts which had been con-

Digitized by Google

solatory to Johnny ever since he set about laying down his line. For it was of course accessible to the public, and could hardly have been proceeded with in the face of much traffic. A few random footsteps might have devastated it in all its length, and equally fatal would have been the pecketing of poultry and the nibbling of goats. But none of those dangerous creatures menaced the construction, which grew dearer to Johnny with every day's new device. When not actually working at it, he kept on it a jealous eye, though the only practical precaution he could take was to drag a trail of barbed thorny briar across the low end of the bank, in hopes that this would deter any wayfarer from ascending. His most anxious moments were of an evening when Tom and Peter Denny would occasionally return home by that route from their field-work, not always with the steadiest gait. Johnny's grey eyes grew black with trouble in his harassed face as he watched apprehensively for the lurch or stagger that might lay his permanent way in ruins. However, this threat of disaster always passed on unfulfilled.

But all through these busy weeks an unrecked-of peril was growing up against him.

Digitized by Google

It might have been tracked to a secluded corner of Maggie Ryan's dark kitchen, where a lily-white hen was sitting on a clutch of brown eggs. She was a very comely fowl, whose fleckless feathers looked as if they had been carved out of a faery marble; and in due time she emerged triumphant, surrounded by a brood of ten downy fluff-balls, who promised to wear exactly the like snowy plumage in maturer months. For the first few days the newcomers confined their explorations of the wide world which had opened upon them to the immediate precincts of Maggie's little house; but one fine morning, when the sun was warm on the dewy grass-banks, and grubs abounded, the whole family were tempted to prolong their rambles some way further up the lane. Thus it happened that Johnny, hobbling out of doors with his head full of fresh plans, was sorely chagrined to find the scene of his labours occupied by a party, clucking and piping, and more banefully scratching and bobbing about. The damage they had as yet done extended only to the knocking down of one telegraph-post; it was the future mischief too surely augured by their appearance which caused his dismay. He could, of course, drive them off for the time being, but

Digitized by Google

he knew that he could not keep perpetually on guard against their incursions. So he scared them with shouts, and then sat down to revolve plans of defence. After some meditation an idea occurred to him, and made him start on an unwontedly long walk—all the way, about a hundred yards, to Maggie Ryan's house.

Maggie was hanging up her blue-rimmed breakfast cup on the brass dresser-hook, when she became aware of a small grey-ragged figure halted at her threshold. "Och! and is it yourself, Johnny lad?" she said, rather surprised, for her dwelling lay almost beyond Johnny's invisible tether, and he but rarely appeared there; "was your mother wantin' anythin'?"

"I'm after seein' a big wild cat," said Johnny, "up above under the hedge." He spoke in a hoarse whisper, which the old woman heard imperfectly, and she crossed over hurriedly to the door, saying: "What was that, sonny?"

"A great big yella wild cat it was," said Johnny, "sittin' yonder behind the bank. The size of a calf it was. Watchin' for chuckens it looked to be."

"Bedad, then! that's like enough, and bad luck to it," said Maggie Ryan, peering out

Digitized by Google

anxiously. "I wonder where at all the white hin has streeled herself off to."

"If you had her shut up in the little shed, there couldn't anythin' be gettin' at them," Johnny observed pointedly.

"Thrue for you," said Maggie Ryan, "and 'twould be a good plan to keep them up till they're a trifle grown anyway, if there's e'er such a bastely brute slingein' about the place. And you were an iligant child to come tell me. Have a bit of flour-cake, honey," she continued, casting about her for some impromptu reward of merit, and finding nothing more appropriate than a griddle-cake, "I'll be steppin' out and drivin' in the hin."

Johnny heard her intention with unqualified approval, and received her gift with more mingled feelings. The three-cornered cake looked inviting, but his conscience flavoured it for him with a tincture of remorse, which is a seasoning to nobody's taste. He took one bite, still lingering at the door, and then said indistinctly: "Plase, ma'am—it wasn't maybe altogether the size of a calf." However, he was so uneasy about the possible effects of even this grudging concession to veracity, that he hastened to add: "But it's a terrible great bigness

Digitized by Google

entirely — and lookin' out it is to catch *somethin'*."

"Ah sure, child alive, calf or no, 'twould be to the full big enough to swally down one of them scraps of chuckens, if it got the chance," said Maggie, "and I'll put them in out of the way of it the next minute. . . . Ah now, to think of the crathur comin' creepin' along all that way to warn me," she said to herself, looking ruthfully after the small figure as it limped and dragged itself out of her ken down the green and gold-spangled space between the hedgerows, "'tis a good-hearted poor little imp, the Lord may pity it." But I fear that the crathur was at this moment sophistically saying in its good heart: "And sure there might aisy be an odd wild cat in it all the while, and I not seein' it. Very belike there *is* a one—or maybe a couple."

For a few days the result of Johnny's stratagem was all that he could desire. The white hen reluctantly found her wanderings circumscribed by the mud walls of the lean-to shed with its thatch of shrivelled potato-haulms, and Johnny was thus enabled to continue his work secure from harassing incursions. He gloatingly gave it several new touches, the most notable being

Digitized by Google

the erection of a heap of old iron, gathered from the bunches of rusty "keys," which the willow-boughs had kept, like a cherished grievance, to dangle among their fresh spring foliage. But then rose a Saturday morning when Maggie Ryan, rather late and flurried in setting out to catch the train at Ballyhoy, failed to adequately fasten the door of the shed where she had been feeding her captive fowl, and the consequence of this oversight was that five minutes afterwards the whole brood were gleefully at large in the lane. As ill-luck would have it, the sedate stalk of the matron tended towards the Dowdall's cabin, retarded but not deflected by her incidental scrapings and pokings, and in her wake the round downy chicks followed dispersedly, yet steadily as foam-bells bobbing along in the current of a stream. So that the prospects of the neighbouring light railway became every moment more seriously imperilled, and had it been vested in a company, its shares might well have fallen with a run.

Meanwhile, Johnny was unaware of the approaching danger, his attention being quite engrossed by an unusual spectacle. A great yellow furniture-van had come lumbering and creaking by, bound for sea-side Quinton, and

Digitized by Google

threading a short cut thither through the lane-labyrinth north of Ballyhoy. Just opposite Mrs Dowdall's residence, which it could have stowed away with ease, some part of the harness collapsed, compelling a halt for repairs, and while one of the two men in charge was splicing and tying, the other opened the van-door to make a change in the disposition of the load. To Johnny, staring hard close by, there was something rather awful about the aspect of the dark interior thus revealed, with the legs and other salient features of its freight dimly visible against a background of cavernous gloom. He thought those black recesses must hold something more mysterious than the indications of tables and chairs which actually met the eye. But he was diverted from his speculations on this point by a very self-complacent clucking croak, which sounded near at hand, and betrayed to him Maggie Ryan's white hen in the act of knocking down his precious signal-post. Her chickens were scattered out all along the line. It was a grave disaster.

Johnny could not run fast to the rescue, and his consciousness of this disability increased the exasperation with which he sent on ahead of his painful hobble his voice uplifted in

Digitized by Google

shrill railing. "Git along out of that, you great ugly, dirty, big bastes of brutes!" he yelled at the little snow-ball chickens. Perhaps also it gave force and precision to his aim when he flung a stone after them. At any rate, the missile came skimming in among the scurrying cluster, and knocked down one of the smallest chickens, which had been running very fast across the road, and chirping at the top of its voice. Its brethren now continued their fleeing and piping, but it remained lying still and silent in the dust. The sight smote Johnny with compunctious dismay, which deepened as he picked it up, and felt how fluffily soft it was, and saw its absurd beak finer than a thorn. He had not thrown the stone with murderous intent, for though he sincerely desired the absence of the family, their slaughter had never occurred to him as a means to that end. Again, he remembered having heard Maggie Ryan say to his mother that she hoped to goodness she might rear the whole clutch, an aspiration which could now never be fulfilled — "and she after often givin' him bits of cake, and bringin' home sugar-sticks from town."

Digitized by Google

These reflections, and not the wreckage of his railway, were uppermost in his mind as he sat on the grassy bank with the lifeless chicken held carefully. It seemed to throw a shadow over everything, although the May morning was still radiant, and the dandelions were glowing and blazing on the sod, like the suns in old engravings, all translated and transfigured. Presently he began to consider how he should best conceal his own rather large share in the tragedy, the revelation of which would, he thought, by no means mend matters. What seemed the simplest plan was to hide away the remains before his mother returned from the fields and Maggie Ryan from town, and let it be supposed that the yellow wild cat had had a privy paw in the affair. This would be merely a sequel to his former fiction, demanding no further imaginative efforts, an advantage, as Johnny did not from choice exercise his ingenuity in that way. He looked down into the tangle of weeds and briars at the bottom of the ditch, which did no doubt offer an obviously convenient sepulchre; but somehow he felt that he would hate to know it was lying there, and he paused irresolute on the brink of dropping it in. Just then his

Digitized by Google

eye was caught by the furniture-van, which still stood with open door, while both its men were round in front working at the harness. Its black depths of darkness looked capable of keeping any secret confided to them, and the idea suddenly struck him that here was a chance of ridding himself effectually of all embarrassments connected with the presence of the little dead bird. Whereupon he arose hastily, hobbled his swiftest, and was barely in time to thrust it as far as he could into the gloomy interior before the vanman came and banged the door. In another minute the clumsy gaudy vehicle was crawling away between the hedges, taking with it the most urgent of Johnny's anxieties. This being removed, he settled down to the repair of his line, and soon became so deeply absorbed in it that he nearly forgot the late catastrophe and the trouble which the straying white hen with her diminished brood threatened to cause him in the future.

As for the yellow van, its depressed sorrel pair dragged it at length out of the many winding lanes, and drew up on the crunching gravel in front of Marine View Villa, which had a pinkish stucco face, and a mock ruin on

Digitized by Google

the lawn. Pat Magennis, the driver's subordinate, let down the board and opened the door preparatory to unloading; but he was amazed, in a small way, to see a tiny round white object emerge from the darkest corner, and come running towards the light with an interrogative chirp.

"Musha, good gracious! and what at all might *you* be offerin' to call yourself?" said Pat; "may I land anywhere if one of them white chickens there was skytin' about the place we stopped at in the lane isn't after leppin' in and comin' along wid us."

"I wish they'd throuble themselves, thin, to keep their ould fowls and crathurs out of streelin' into *my* loads, where they're not wanted," said glumly the driver, who had started that day in a captious temper. "Just chuck it down out of that, and be gettin' at them arm-chairs."

Pat obeyed this behest, with modifications, for he deposited the stowaway chicken carefully under a rose-bush in a round box-edged flower-bed. "Sure 'twas the quare notion took you to not be stoppin' paiceable in your own place," he said to it with some sternness; but the white chicken cocked its eye at him

Digitized by Google

unabashed, and its self-confidence increased when he shook a few bread-crumbs for it out of the red handkerchief which held his luncheon. He was so much interested in watching its meal that he did not turn away until bawled at by his chief to "lave foolin' there and be mindin' his business," when he had to take up the less congenial occupation of carrying about heavy furniture. The chicken, he thought, would surely have disappeared before he was free again; but having got through his tasks, he found it where he had left it, safe and brisk, and apparently not loth to be recaptured. By this time Gaffney, the driver's, bad temper had worsened to such an intolerable degree that Pat preferred a journey home, sitting uncomfortably with dangling legs on the board at the van door, to the alternative share of the front seat. The rather because he was now conveying the chicken in his breast pocket, whence its alert head protruded, and where it would, he knew, be made a theme of morose sarcasms by his grumpy companion. He half intended to bestow it upon his sister's small children when he got back; a prospect which might have caused its friends to bless its stars

Digitized by Google

that it did not possess the faculty of looking before and after.

While the empty van proceeded with undulatory motion townwards, Mrs Dowdall and Maggie Ryan on their way from field-work and marketing, fell in with one another at the end of the lane, and arrived home simultaneously. Johnny had forgotten all about them in a rapt attempt to mimic, with bent twigs and the bottom of an old tin mug, the marvellous revolving turn-table which he had once admired at the big Dublin terminus; but when he espied their two long-drawn shadows preceding them down the sun-set litten lane, his thoughts immediately reverted to the morning's mishap, and he glanced uneasily around in quest of the white hen. He was annoyed to see her approaching from the opposite direction, so that the loss would most likely soon be noticed. "There niver was such an ould crathur for comin' where she isn't wanted," he said to himself, regarding her with the gaze of concentrated bitterness so commonly encountered by objects that manifest this unpopular propensity. Well for them if they can meet it with the serene indifference of Maggie Ryan's hen.

Digitized by Google

But Maggie's mind was evidently pre-occupied just then to the exclusion of concern about her poultry. She set down her old, broken-lidded basket on the bank, and began to grope among its contents with an air of exultant mystery. "Well, Johnny lad," she said; "them's great conthrivances you've got there entirely, but I question now would you iver ha' put together the likes of that." So saying, she produced a toy tin railway carriage about two inches long, and handed it to Johnny. It was painted a strong green, picked out with scarlet, and might be considered a very brilliant and highly-finished pennyworth. If Johnny's conscience had been clear, such a gift would have afforded him the liveliest pleasure, stirring his imagination to fresh delightful activity; as things were, however, there at once arose before him a piteous downy spectre, which poignantly upbraided him with the loss sustained at his hands by the bestower of such benefits. So he only turned scarlet, and stared dumbly at the carriage. The two women attributed his embarrassed silence to shyness and surprise. "'Deed now, ma'am, it was too good of you altogether to be thinkin' of him," said his mother; "sure, he's fairly took aback wid

Digitized by Google

your kindness. Bad manners to you, Johnny, haven't you so much as a thank you at all?"

"Och, the crathur!" said Maggie Ryan, deprecatingly. "Thry will it run along on the line for you, sonny."

Johnny set the toy on his twig-rails, and found that the wheels fitted as exactly as if the gauge had been made to suit them. This discovery excited him a little; yet in a moment his eyes wandered towards the neighbouring thorn-clump behind which the hen had temporarily disappeared, to emerge presently at closer quarters. But before that happened, a much more imposing object arrived on the scene. Round the corner came the great mustard-coloured van, in which he had laid his victim to find a vast and wandering grave. He watched it lumber up, and speculated as to whether the little white heap were still lying in the dark angle by the door. Then a more alarming surmise occurred to him. What if the vanmen, enraged at the liberty taken with their vehicle, should have traced the deed to him, and would now stop and denounce it? The danger of this seemed to have passed harmlessly by, but it suddenly returned with a rush, for the man who had been sitting on

Digitized by Google

the board at the door, slid hastily off his low seat, and came running back to the group at the bank. His first words, too, were ominous. "Might you happen to be missin' e'er a little white chicken?" he said.

"Not to my knowledge, we didn't," Maggie Ryan began, but Pat interrupted her, as he caught sight of the hen and chickens, which by this time were close at hand.

"Bedad, yis; itself's the livin' moral of one of them," he said, "it must ha' hopped into us the time we was stoppin' here this mornin'. I'd a notion to bring it home wid me to the childher, but like enough 'twould only die on them, or else they might have it tore in pieces contendin' over it, and besides that, it has the heart of me broke conthrollin' it from fluttherin' out of me ould pocket every minute of time." As he spoke, he extracted the chicken, and set it down on the ground, where it promptly rejoined its brethren, after which they all ran "through other" with such bewildering liveliness, that in a moment or two no one could have confidently singled out the travelled member of the family.

"Why, thrue for you," said Maggie Ryan, "one and one is two, and two is four—sure

Digitized by Google

enough there'd be but nine widout it. Glory be to goodness now, to think of it settin' up to take off wid itself that way! I'd ha' been as sorry as anythin' to lose it, after me brother, poor man, disthressin' himself sendin' herself there up to me from his bit of a place in the county Wicklow, along wid the clutch of eggs, to make a beginnin' like of a few fowls for me to be keepin'. And only a couple bad out of the whole dozen, and not a coloured feather but white on a one of them."

The end of this statement was lost upon Pat Magennis, who had run off after the receding van.

"I dunno how they got strayin' out," Maggie continued, "but I'll put them up safe now at all events, before I wet me cup of tay. So goodnight to you kindly, ma'am, and, Johnny, don't thravel away too far from us entirely on that grand line of rails." She went her way, driving in front of her the white hen and chickens, and Johnny, who had witnessed this resurrection with almost incredulous eyes, was left to gloat over his latest acquisition, no longer now poisoned for him by remorseful memories. It was not until the last glimmer of clearness had died out of the dusk that he shunted the new

Digitized by Google

carriage into a siding by his truck, and withdrew lingeringly indoors.

At this point Johnny's light railway had reached the highest pitch of perfection to which it ever attained, and I wish I could append a report of continued prosperity. But that was not to be. An hour or so later, anybody who had happened to be abroad in the lane might have noticed a dimness steal over the stars to the south-eastward, until they turned from twinkling rosettes of light into the semblance of tarnished silver nails, and anon were vanished altogether as if they had dropped out of their holes. The drifts of vapour blowing in from the sea spread and thickened fast; the hedgerows began to rustle, and large rain-drops made dark wafers dispersedly in the shimmering white dust on the road. Presently the night was all filled with the sound and scent of rain, driving and splashing and dripping. When the May morning broke this downpour was over, and the clouds were lifting to widen a chink of glowing amber. But along the bank where Johnny's railway had run, a brisk little stream went rippling, and the only trace of craftmanship remaining there was the tin carriage, overset and lying on its side in the water.

Digitized by Google

Perhaps the ruin thus wrought sounds more deplorable than it in reality was. Of one thing we may feel certain; that an inventive child with ample puddles at his command, and no authorities present to enforce decrees against dabbling, would never, in the longest day, find himself stinted of congenial occupation—our most unalloyed boon. The white hen, too, and her family had again escaped, and were thoroughly enjoying themselves on the track of many small black and fawn-coloured slugs, whom the wet grass had tempted forth. And if these latter were not quite happy under the turn affairs were taking, it is clearly impossible to satisfy all parties, and when discontent is confined to things which slimily creep and crawl, we may at any rate hope that it has been reduced to its very lowest power.

Digitized by Google

ROSANNE

TOWARDS seven o'clock on a summer evening in July, Rosanne should have been helping her mistress in the dairy, instead of which she was sitting under the shadow of the big water-barrel at the kitchen-door and writing to her sweetheart. She wrote to tell him how she had been given leave to go home next Sunday, and she did not stop to consider that she was at this very moment risking the loss of her holiday, by getting into disgrace for neglect of duty. But it was not Rosanne's way to think of more than one thing at a time, so when it occurred to her that John Gahan, who had called about the loan of a hay-shaker, might post a letter for her as he went home, she acted upon the idea without further reflection. She had her paper spread out on the barrel stand, and craned her curly head over it at unlikely angles as she enjoined Dan McClean to meet her at Hunt's in Kilbracken, where the gig would drop her next Saturday evening.

Digitized by Google

Meanwhile the dairy work had been going on well enough without her. Mrs Conroy had a pleased smile as she saw the ripe yellow cream curl smoothly up under her skimmer, and added it to the rich contents of her great wide-mouthed gathering-crock. She thought they would have a grand churning to-morrow, and at least a dozen pounds of butter for Saturday's fair. But when she had finished, she recollected that Rosanne should have been there to carry the pigs their supper of sour skim milk; and after calling her in vain several times, she sent little Ned to find her, and bid her come along out of that this instant. Ned delivered this message, with the pithy addition: "She's ragin'"; and so in frightened haste Rosanne finished addressing her envelope with wild blots, and overset the ink bottle, and rushed away to fetch the bucket. When she reached the dairy she was relieved at finding nobody there to scold her, and, still hurry-driven, she filled her bucket and ran off with it across the yard. Rosanne rather liked seeing the pigs at their supper, they wriggled so all over with enjoyment, and she now leaned against the stye-door to watch them. She began to sing *Norah Creina,* but in the middle of the first verse she stopped abruptly.

Digitized by Google

A frightful misgiving had suddenly seized her, come she knew not whence. She leaned forward and looked into the trough; she snatched up her bucket and examined it carefully; and then she perceived that she had indeed done a dreadful thing. In her haste she had emptied the wrong crock, and had thrown a week's gathering of cream to the pigs!

How dreadful it was, she could estimate by the pride her mistress took in the row of rich yellow-topped milk-pans, the precautions with which she surrounded them, her wrath if any clumsiness imperilled them. What would that wrath be now? Rosanne made her mind up all in a minute not to face it. She would run away home. It was no such great distance across the fields; she might get there, she supposed, before it was quite dark. She thought her father would be glad to see her, and if so, her stepmother must perforce acquiesce. But at all events there was Dan McClean, who would be certainly "as plased as anythin'," and make much of her, and take her part whatever happened—Dan's stalwart frame held up the whole fabric of Rosanne's future. Beyond a doubt she had lost her chance of getting a holiday in any other way, she thought, as she

Digitized by Google

raced at full speed back to the house. For she had no time to hesitate, as the discovery might at any moment prevent her flight. Luckily almost everybody was out in the hayfield, and she got up to her attic unperceived. There she collected her few most cherished little possessions—the rest might be fetched afterwards—threw on her shawl, and once more dared the creaking clattering stairs, and the passage that led by the awful dairy door. Fortune still favoured her; she escaped all their perils, and was presently scrambling through the gap in the briery hedge into the meadows at the back of the haggard. She ran all the way through the first field, because she had such a vivid picture in her mind of what might be at that very minute happening within doors. She could almost see Mrs Conroy's face as she stared into the empty cream crock, and hear her terrible call, loud and peremptory, "Rosanne, Rosanne." The mere thought of it made her scud along like a rabbit.

But at the end of the field she heard real voices, for the haymakers were returning to the house, so she slipped out of their way, behind a smooth-sided haycock. When they passed, she stole back to the foot-path, and on again.

Digitized by Google

About Rathcrumlyn Farm the land was all down in meadow, and the fields were bordered by thick bosky hedges. Tall cocks threw shadows nearly across some of them, and the interspaces were very goldenly green with fresh-springing after-grass, under westering sunbeams. On others the newly mown swathes still lay in soft waves, and the shorn sward underneath was paler hued, not having had time to thrust up any young blades since the sweep of the scythe went by. Along under the hedge the remnant of the meadow made a fringe with feathery crests drooping and creamy plumes, tall stalks that unfurled white sunshades, and here and there a scarlet poppy. The drops of an earlier shower still twinkled beneath them, and Rosanne's crisp pink calico skirt grew limp and bedraggled as she brushed by. But she did not heed this; for the one article of dress that she much regarded—her new hat with its wreaths of curious buff and crimson roses—rested safely on her head, and her head was full of pre-occupying speculations. She began to think that perhaps, after all, no such great harm was done. That is to say, it was, of course, a woful pity about the beautiful cream; but for the matter of losing her place

Digitized by Google

thereby, she wasn't sure that she wouldn't as lief as not quit being in service. And she thought it as like as not that when she came home this way, Dan McClean would again take up the notion of their getting married after the harvest. That was what he had wanted to do in the spring, if her stepmother had not put it into everybody's head that it would be better for them to get together a few pounds before they set up housekeeping. Rosanne now said to herself that she did not see any occasion for it. She wondered, too, what sort of girl Maggie Walsh, her stepsister, who had just come to live at home, was apt to be. She had a presentiment that there would be little love lost between them. However, that didn't much signify—by reason of Dan.

Through three or four fields Rosanne passed without meeting anything to interrupt these cogitations. Now and then the voices of home-going hay-makers were wafted over a hedge, and a belated corncrake was heard from a long way off faintly "creak-creaking." The shadows lengthened silently all about, and the sun-lit interspaces seemed as they shrank to grow more jewel-like in their shimmering emerald. From a sheltering corner a large olive-mottled frog

Digitized by Google

started up out of the tangled grass, and went flinging himself on before her in a long series of expanding leaps; but at last she almost trod on him as he stopped and sat suddenly squatting. At the same moment somebody called her name loudly, close by—"Rosanne, Rosanne."

A flappy white sun-bonnet was looking at her over a gate in a hedge, a little way to the right; and in it she recognised her cousin, Martha Reilly, who lived near them at home. "And where might you be off to?" Martha said, as Rosanne came up to the gate, "and wid fine grandeur on you," she added, referring to the rose-wreathed hat.

"Sure I'm just streelin' about a bit," Rosanne said with rather confused unconcern. She regretted the encounter, and was not at all disposed to confide in Martha, who had the name of being "the greatest ould gossip you'd meet in a long day's walk." "It's a fine warm evenin'," she continued, to account for her stroll.

"Warm enough, bedad," said Martha, "you might say so if it was in the hay you'd been. I come up yisterday to work above at Hilfirthy's, and I was manin' to run over this evenin' and

Digitized by Google

see you, on'y somethin' delayed me. And what's the best good news wid you this long while?"

"I dunno is there any news in partic'lar, bad or good," said Rosanne, with a guilty "I could an' I would" in her mind as she thought of the pigs' supper.

"Then you *haven't* heard tell about Dan McClean?" said Martha, suddenly craning her neck over the topmost bar.

"What about him at all?" said Rosanne with a great start.

"You haven't heard?" Martha repeated in a half incredulous tone.

"Can't you tell me?" said Rosanne.

"I'll come over to you—just wait?" said Martha. She launched her pitchfork across the gate, and began to scale its many bars with remarkable agility. She had scarcely flopped to the ground, on Rosanne's side of it, before she said: "He's took up wid Maggie Walsh, that's what it is."

"Took up wid her?" said Rosanne, staring up stupidly at her cousin.

"Ay, bedad and so he has," said Martha, "but it come to my knowledge on'y last Sunday. About gettin' married they are after the

Digitized by Google

harvest—he and your stepmother's daughter. And he be all account as good as promised to you, Rosanne!"

"Who was telling you so? He never set eyes on her till she came home after Easter. Dan's no affair of mine. I don't believe any such thing," said Rosanne, rattling the rusty bolt of the padlocked gate.

"Sure they was all talkin' about it after Mass," said Martha, "and that evenin' I taxed the young feller's mother wid it, and she didn't deny it. Och, Rosanne, but you was a fine fool to let your stepmother pack you off to service that-a-way, wid Maggie just comin' home. Earnin' money for yourself, bedad! 'Deed now what notion she had in her mind's as plain to see as the seeds in a ripe gooseberry. Puttin' you out of it she was the way she'd have the chance of gettin' young Dan for her own girl —and that's what she's after doin' on you."

"She's welcome," said Rosanne, desperately.

"Och, that's just talkin', Rosanne," said Martha, "I was spakin' about it to your father on Tuesday. I'd ha' thought he'd be none too well plased, but he said nothin' agin it. I suppose she had him persuaded, poor man. And Dan's mother was axin' me had I heard tell anythin'

Digitized by Google

about a young chap was coortin' you up here. Mark my words, that's the story your step-mother's been puttin' into their heads. But I tould Mrs McClean there wasn't a *iotum* of truth in it as far as I knew. And there isn't, in coorse?" Martha said, glancing again rather suspiciously at the grand hat.

"Maybe there is, and maybe there isn't," said Rosanne defiantly. "It's no affair of anybody's. Let other people mind their own business, and I'll mind mine. And let them plase themselves —the pack of them—and they'll plase me. I dunno which of them's the greatest liar; but it's little I trouble meself about them. And it's time for me to be runnin' back, or else I'll be too late. So good-night to you kindly—och don't be delayin' me, you ould tormint!" Rosanne whisked the corner of her shawl out of Martha's detaining grasp, and ran away down the field. As she went she struck up *Norah Creina*, and sang it lustily as long as she thought herself within hearing; but her mind was not at all occupied with that gentle bashful heroine. The sun had disappeared behind the rounded tops of Drumaree Wood while she talked to Martha, and the vivid lights had gone out among the haycocks and hedges. Everything had

Digitized by Google

grown dimly green, soft and cool, and when she left off singing, not a sound was to be heard. But her thoughts were travelling through the scorching, hissing, whirling chaos into which this thunderbolt of tidings had shattered the world before her. Dan, and the little house of her own, and love and trust, and a fine wedding and the Aylesbury ducks Mrs Conroy had promised her, and her pride in old Tim Donagh's remark that she had got the best lad on six townlands—all were swept away from her, and in their places seethed a flood of jealousy, rage, and despair. As its first rush subsided, she recollected several things that seemed like disregarded warnings of Martha's news. She had wondered now and again that Dan had never managed to get over and see her between this and Easter; and then the last time old Biddy Doran from his place was up at the Farm he hadn't sent e'er a message by her at all. The reason was plain enough now. And with that, Rosanne bethought her of the letter which *she* had sent by John Gahan, and which might be delivered by this time. Perhaps Dan was at that minute of time laughing with Maggie Walsh over the suggestion that he should be wasting his evening streeling off to meet Rosanne Tierney at Kilbracken.

Digitized by Google

Cock her up. This possibility was the cruel little barb of mortification by which the crushing bulk of her misfortune caught hold of her mind, and she raged at herself for having ignorantly wrought it.

But circumstances seldom allow us to rage long uninterrupted, and while Rosanne walked on, the fields grew dimmer, and the green greyer, and the breeze chillier, and the grass wetter, until at last she found that the thorny briers which twitched her by the shawl as she passed them, were beginning to ask her where she was going. It was a puzzling question. To go home among those false, scheming, triumphant creatures, could not for a moment be thought of. It would be more tolerable to return and face the storm in the dairy at Rathcrumlyn Farm, and even that was quite impossible. On such consideration as she could give, only one answer occurred to her. She would go to her aunt Lizzie Mahony, her mother's sister, who had always been good-natured and friendly. The Mahonys, it was true, lived rather a long step off, somewhere beyond Hewitstown; still she thought she could certainly contrive to get there in the course of the next day, and she knew they

Digitized by Google

would be glad to see her. After that, her future was all drearily vague. She supposed that she could get field work to do, and sometimes she even thought wildly of turning ballad-singer. Dan used to say that she had a voice fit to make her fortune; but of course that might only have been one of his lies, for it was evident you could not believe a word that came out of his head. The further her feet and her reflections travelled, the more attractive grew the picture of the Mahonys' little white cottage, with her aunt looking out at the door, and saying: "Glory be to goodness, if it isn't little Rosanne." For the fields around her spread lonelier, and stranger, and the moonlight began to fill them cruelly with ghostly gleams and shades. At last in a great fright she crept under a haystack, and shivered and dozed in unequal alternations till the dawn.

It found her bewilderingly miserable, but delivered from the panic fears that had beset her, while the world was black and white, and she stole out of the yellow-mounded haggard on to the high road close by. She hardly noticed that she was hungry and cold, and damp with dew, as she resumed her journey, upon which the July sun soon began to glare strong

Digitized by Google

and fierce. The way was much longer than she thought, and she lengthened it by missing it several times, finding intricate directions all the more puzzling because she was dazed for the want of food and sleep. Two women of whom she had made inquiries, and who told her of terribly many miles, gave her a drink of milk, but that was all she had the whole day. With her gaudy hat and her carelessly wisped on shawl, and bedraggled pink gown, her curly hair tossed and ruffled, and her eyes wild and woebegone, she had become a forlorn, strange-looking figure, which passers-by eyed curiously, and on which they sometimes made remarks. This alarmed her greatly, for solitary wanderings were a new experience to her. She made up her mind never to be a ballad-singer, and her aunt's house grew a more and more desired refuge. At last when the shadows stretched very long, and the sunbeams had relaxed their scorching grip, she came to a bit of road that seemed familiar to her. Round the next turn, if she was not mistaken, stood the little white cottage at the foot of a steep field, in the angle where two lonings met—she remembered the place very well.

And sure enough, round the corner, just as

Digitized by Google

she had hoped, the little white cottage came into view, a sight which for a few moments she beheld with much comfort of heart. But she had not taken many quick steps towards it, before she perceived that something was amiss. On the brown slope of the thatch a thick cloud of smoke was brooding, dull and pale, and as she looked, thicker black clouds came rolling up through it in great heavy puffs, pierced here and there by sharp thrusts of flame, which even under the sunset flush of the sky gleamed strong and red. Very clearly the house was on fire, which was a dreadful thing; but what struck Rosanne with still more dismay, was that there seemed to be nobody about to mind it. Three small stranger boys were sitting on the triangular grass-plot between the two lanes just in front of the cottage, but they were busily playing some game with bits of broken crockery, and taking no interest in the fire. Nobody else was to be seen. Rosanne ran up to the children in a breathless scare. "Where's all the Mahonys?" she said, "sure they can't be in it, wid the roof blazin' over their heads?" One of the boys glanced at her indifferently. "Och, the Mahonys was put out of it yisterday for the rint," he said, "and the Colonel's

Digitized by Google

burnin' the ould bad houses to hinder the people of comin' back to them, and squatters, and tramps, and all manner. Give me the blue-edged bit, Billy."

"And where's me uncle gone to?" said Rosanne.

"I dunno," said the boy, "unless it was to the Union below at Hewitstown."

"Sure not at all," said Billy, "I heard them sayin' Pat Mahony was gone to his brother's place away at Tullylough."

The first boy, who was freckled, and blue-eyed, and red-haired, put out his tongue in acknowledgment of this correction, and the third, who was like him, said: "No, he isn't. They've all took off to the States." Rosanne thought they looked quite fiendishly hideous. She was turning towards the house when Billy said: There's nobody in it;" but his brother said: "Yis, there is, after that agin. I seen Alec Anderson and another of the bailiff's men goin' round wid a pitchfork a while ago."

Rosanne ran desperately up to the door, and looked in. It was all a smother of smoke inside, and the flames might be heard gnashing their teeth among the crackling rafters. Then she ran on round the corner of the house, and there,

Digitized by Google

sure enough, were two men, one of whom, standing on the pig-stye wall, was poking a pitchfork into the thatch. The fact was that Alec Anderson, who had a thrifty turn, had noticed a fresh golden patch where Pat Mahony had lately darned his roof, and now deemed it worth while to rescue the good bit of straw from the conflagration for use on his own premises. Burning cabins is hot and thirsty work on a radiant July day, and Anderson's mood had become irritable over it. So when a dishevelled slip of a vagrant girl, wrapped in an old rag of a shawl surmounted by an incongruous gay hat, came rushing up to him, and in horror-stricken accents asked would he plase be tellin' her where Mrs Mahony was gone, he felt moved to reply by tossing down a bundle of thatch on her off his fork, and saying: "Ou spier that at somebody that kens or cares, me hizzie, and dinna be bletherin' here awa'." Unluckily the bundle had a red-hot smouldering core, and as it dropped on Rosanne's head, it knocked off her hat, and set her hair alight, and fell in scorching flakes before her eyes. She was fleeing away, blinded and terrified, but she tripped over a stone, and fell with her head against the wall, which stunned her into unconcern.

Digitized by Google

By the time that her troublesome world came back to her, she had been conveyed to the infirmary ward of the Hewitstown workhouse, a doleful white-washed place, where the last red rays of the sunset were beating on the grimy windows. Poor Rosanne's fortunes had sunk so deeply within the last four and twenty hours that you would hardly have recognised her as the same girl who had talked to her cousin Martha at the gate among the hay-fields, while the sun went down behind a screen of rounded tree-tops. For her clothes were blackened and drenched with fire and water, and, much worse, her pretty curling hair was all burnt off, and one side of her face was scorched. Next morning her neighbour in the ward thoughtfully lent her a bit of broken looking-glass that "she might see the quare show she was;" but she had scarcely energy to glance at it, and was faintly shocked by the disfigured image. For two days she lay in a dull apathetic state, and took little heed of anything. It seemed to her as if she had been there always in a dreary sort of dream.

But on the Monday, when the creeping shadow on the floor had shrunken almost to its noontide skimpiness, she suddenly roused up

Digitized by Google

quite awake. Just outside the door, which was close to her bed, she heard a familiar voice speaking—the voice of Dan McClean. Rosanne held her breath as the nurse, a square framed stolid person, was called out to interview "a young man from about Kilbracken, that was come axin' after a girl." Dan's voice would have sounded like heavenly music to her, if the echo of Martha's had not come harshly through it and jarred it into discord.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," she heard him say diffidently, "might there be a girl be the name of Rosanne Tierney in it?"

"Is it the name?" said the nurse, "sure I couldn't be tellin' you the names of the half of them that comes and goes. What sort is she?"

"Och, a slip of a girl," said Dan, whose descriptive powers were not great, "a slip of a girl—wid black hair—and a smallish size she is."

"There's plenty of them like that, if that's all," said the nurse, "we've a black-haired one come in the other day, not over big. Some sort of a tramp she is, and got a crack on the head wid a bit of the roof slippin' down on her; but I could be axin' her her name. Rosanne Tierney did you say? And what might you be to her supposin' she is? Her brother maybe?"

Digitized by Google

It seemed to Rosanne as if an endless pause followed this question; yet Dan only hesitated for a moment before he answered. "Och well, ma'am," he said, "you might say I'm as good as a brother anyway."

And with that a stormy darkness fell upon Rosanne. For what could "as good as a brother" signify, except marriage with the stepsister Maggie Walsh? She hoped to goodness she might never have the misfortune to set eyes on either of the two of them to the end of her life's days—and she'd as lief that mightn't be very long—a pair of black-hearted rogues—the villain might just go back the way he came.

When a minute afterwards the nurse returned to make her enquiry, the tramp kept her head under the blanket, and would only mutter in a husky mumbling way: "I dunno any such people at all—Bid him get along out of that—me name's Isabella Hill," facts which were at once reported to Dan outside in the passage, with the additional details that the crathur seemed to be a cross-tempered one, and perhaps not quite right in her senses. But at this moment another visitor arrived, in the shape of a small freckled and red-haired boy, who was

Digitized by Google

carrying, with an averse expression of countenance, a large, gaudily-wreathed straw hat. "And what might *you* be wantin', Matthew Flanigan?" said the nurse.

"Me mother bid me be bringin' th' ould hat," said Matthew. "It dropped off the girl that got hurted up at Pat Mahony's on Friday, and me brother brought it home, but she sez it might be a loss to the crathur that owned it, so she sent me along wid it, and it's him she'd a right to ha' sent——"

"Be the powers of smoke," Dan exclaimed, seizing hold of the hat, "that's belongin' to Rosanne Tierney; she got it new at Easter, and as proud of herself in it she was as a little paycock. Sure I remember this tuft of yeller roses wid red glass beads in them cocked up at the side of it; I was tellin' her it looked for all the world like a one of our ould donkey's ears; and was axin' her why wouldn't she be sticking up the other to match it."

"For the matter of that," said the nurse, "there's dozens of quare hats goin' about the world, and all of them that deminted lookin' you'd be hard set to tell the one from the other. The aquil of the outlandish gazaboes you see on people these times I niver witnessed."

Digitized by Google

"Ah, but I couldn't be mistook in this one be any manes," said Dan, continuing to examine the hat, "sure 'twas sittin' in front of me in the trap all the way drivin' over from her place to our place and back agin of Easter Sunday, an' here it is the very same. Couldn't I be seein' the girl, ma'am, just for a minyit, for if she isn't Rosanne——."

But here a voice called loudly and clearly through the half open door. "Don't you offer to be comin' next or nigh me, Dan McClean. I'm no such thing. Git away home to Maggie Walsh," it said, and Dan's sunburnt face grew two inches shorter at the sound. "Glory be to goodness, it's herself," he said, "and me heart broke thinkin' what had become of her ever since Saturday mornin'. Sure, I'll not be comin' in if you're not wishful, jewel," he said, peering warily round the edge of the door, "but what talk at all was that you had about Maggie Walsh?"

"It was me cousin Martha Reilly was tellin' me all manner," said Rosanne, who felt as if she were wakening up out of a very ill-favoured nightmare.

"Trust Martha Reilly to be gabbin' about what doesn't consarn her," said Dan. "Troth

Digitized by Google

I well knew your stepmother was puttin' that story about this while back, and divil a word of truth in it. 'Deed Rosanne, that ould woman isn't any too good I'm thinkin'. But sure what matter about the pack of them? Your aunt Lizzie Mahony's stoppin' wid her sister-in-law away at Drumcastle. I discovered that much yisterday—and they bid me be bringin' you to stay up there till we would be gittin' married afore raipin' begins. Maggie Walsh bedad! Is it idling me time I'd be trampin' over the country after her on a Monday mornin' in the middle of haymakin'? So hurry up, honey, and git all right agin, the way I can be comin' to fetch you. I'll borry Jimmy Byrne's side-car."

"And did you hear tell the quare awful thing I done at the Farm—throwin' all Mrs Conroy's grand crame to the pigs?" said Rosanne, the recollection of this disaster now beginning to emerge from the chaos of troubles which had overwhelmed and obliterated it. But Dan replied unappalled: "Why to be sure. And was that any raison for you to be throwin' yourself after it, so to spake? Not if every sup of crame in Ireland was spilt, and all the pigs in the country swimmin' in the middle of it

Digitized by Google

—ay, and your stepmother, and her daughter, and Martha Reilly, that can't be aisy unless she's gabbin', along wid the lot of them."

So a few Sundays later Rosanne Tierney was married in her gay buff and crimson wreathed hat. It was slightly battered and the worse for its travels, but it would have been ungrateful of her to discard it, as only for its timely turning up on a former critical occasion, it might probably enough at that moment have been worn by a forlorn little distracted vagrant, instead of adorning the proud and happy head of Mrs Daniel McClean.

THE END.

TURNBULL AND SPEARS, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

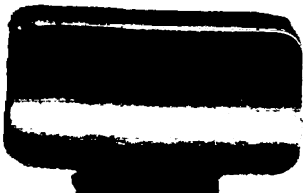
YB 741

R
75

M239399

955
B258
mr

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google